

Information Booklet for Parents of Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs

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INFORMATION BOOKLET FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

NCSE 2019



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Acronymns

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder
AON	Assessment of Need
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DSM-V	Diagnostic Statistical Manual, Volume 5
EBD	Emotional and Behavioural Disorder
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
EPSEN	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs
GAM	General Allocation Model
GLD	General Learning Disability
HSE	Health Service Executive
ICD-10	International Classification of Diseases 10th Revision
IEP	Individual Education Plan
JCSP	Junior Certificate School Programme
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied
LCVP	Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
NBSS	National Behaviour Support Service
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NEWB	National Educational Welfare Board
RACE	Reasonable Accommodations in Certificate Examinations
SEC	State Examination Commission
SENO	Special Educational Needs Organiser
SERC	Special Education Review Committee
SESS	Special Education Support Service
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
TES	Teacher Education Section

1. Introduction

Education is about supporting children to develop in all aspects of their lives – spiritual, moral, cognitive, emotional, imaginative, aesthetic, social and physical. It should enable children to live full and independent lives so that they can contribute to their communities, cooperate with other people and continue to learn throughout their lives. All children, including children with special educational needs, have a right to an education that is appropriate to their needs.

This booklet answers key questions that parents¹ of children with special educational needs may have about their education. It has been developed in consultation with schools, parents and other stakeholders and is focused on the wellbeing and best interests of children with special educational needs.

Topics covered in the booklet include:

- What is a special educational need?
- What is a learning disability?
- How are children's learning needs assessed?
- What is an inclusive approach to education?
- Pre-school children
- Educational provision for school aged students
- What supports are available for your child in school?
- Choosing a school for your child
- What will your child learn at school?
- Planning for transitions
- How as a parent can you support your child?
- What organisations are there to support your child?
- Where can you get more information about your child's special educational needs?

We hope that this booklet will help parents to feel more informed and more confident to take a meaningful part in decision making that affects their children's education in school.

¹ The word 'parent' in this document should be taken to include guardians of children.

In addition to this booklet, the NCSE has also published the following information for parents:

- Guidelines for parents on the transition of students with special educational needs:
 - Starting School
 - Changing School: Moving from Primary to Post-Primary
 - Changing Schools: Moving between Special and Mainstream School
 - Planning for Life after School
- Information on Post-School Education and Training Options for Adults and School Leavers with Disabilities
- Nine information leaflets on particular areas of special educational needs including: general learning disabilities; specific learning disabilities; emotional and/or behavioural difficulties or disorders; physical disabilities; blind/visual impairment; deaf/hard of hearing; specific speech and language disorder; deafblind/with dual sensory loss; and autism spectrum disorder
- An information leaflet on the Special Needs Assistant (SNA) Scheme.
- Information leaflets on Options for Adults and School Leavers with Disabilities

All of the above information is available on the NCSE website at: <http://ncse.ie/information-booklets-pamphlets-2>. Hard copies are available from your local SENO.

In Summary:

All children, including children with special educational needs, have a right to an education that is appropriate to their needs and that enables them to develop in line with their own individual potential.

2. What is a Special Educational Need?

A special educational need can arise from a child's disability, such as:

- physical
- sensory (blindness/visual impairment, deafness/hard of hearing)
- mental health
- learning disability

or from another condition that results in a child learning differently from a child without that condition.

Children with disabilities may have special educational needs and require additional support in school to assist them to achieve their own individual potential. There are also children with disabilities who may not have any special educational needs that require additional supports in school.

Children with special educational needs are children first, and have much in common with other children of the same age. There are many aspects to a child's development that make up the whole child, including – personality, the ability to communicate (verbal and non-verbal), resilience and strength, the ability to appreciate and enjoy life, the desire to learn whatever his/her potential ability. Children have individual strengths, personalities and experiences so particular disabilities will impact differently on them. A child's special educational need does not define the whole child.

The **Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act** was passed into law in July 2004 to provide that:

- the education of children with special educational needs, wherever possible, takes place in an inclusive environment with other children who do not have such needs
- children with special educational needs have the same right to avail of, and benefit from, appropriate education as do their peers who do not have such needs.

Special educational needs are defined in the EPSEN Act as:

'a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition and cognate words shall be construed accordingly'.

The EPSEN Act has not been fully implemented due to economic circumstances but this decision is under ongoing review. The sections of the Act which have come into force deal mainly with the right to be educated in an inclusive manner, the duties of schools and the establishment of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). The sections of the Act which have not yet been implemented include those which give statutory rights to children with special educational needs in relation to assessment, individual education plans and the right to make appeals.

A number of other pieces of legislation are relevant to children with special educational needs and their parents. The key features of this broad legal framework are outlined in Appendix 2. The full text of all of these Acts can be viewed at: <http://www.oireachtas.ie/>.

In Summary:

Special educational needs can arise from a physical, sensory (blindness/visual impairment, deafness/hard of hearing), mental health or learning disability.

Children with special educational needs are children first and have many different strengths, talents and abilities.

The EPSEN Act was passed into law in 2004 and gives children with special educational needs the same right to avail of, and benefit from, appropriate education as their peers who do not have such needs.

3. What is a Learning Disability?

A learning disability can be **general** or **specific** in nature. Important differences between general and specific learning disabilities are explained in more detail in the sections below.

General Learning Disability (GLD)

Children with general learning disabilities find it more difficult to learn, understand and do things than other children of the same age. They can continue to learn and make progress all through their lives but at a slower pace than other children.

A general learning disability can be at the level of mild, moderate or severe/profound. The impact of the disability can be very different for individuals, with each child showing a unique profile of strengths and needs.

A psychologist is the professional who assesses children's learning ability. When psychologists do this, they take into account a number of different factors. These include the age of the child and how well the child is:

- Coping with ordinary everyday tasks at school and at home such as dressing and feeding, using money, home-work, going to the shop for messages, and so on
- Making friends with their peer-group and being able to take part, appropriately, in games and other activities
- Performing on tests of intelligence, reading, numeracy
- Using and understanding language.

Mild General Learning Disability

Children with mild general learning disability develop at a slower rate than other children. Their speech and language may take longer to develop. They may have difficulty in forming concepts, such as colour, and in putting their thoughts and ideas into words. Some children may show a lack of co-ordination in motor activities, for example, hand-writing, football, skipping or tying shoelaces. It can be more difficult for these children to pay attention in class and to remember what they have learned. They may have greater difficulty transferring what they learn in the classroom to other settings. Children with mild general learning disability have difficulties with most areas of the curriculum in school, including reading, writing and comprehension and mathematics.

It can also take longer for them to develop the skills that are necessary for daily living which include the ability to take care of themselves and to relate to others. Some children with mild general learning disability may find it difficult to adapt to school life and may show signs of inappropriate or what might be considered immature behaviour.

Moderate General Learning Disability

Children with moderate general disability show significant delays in reaching developmental milestones, such as walking, talking, reading, writing and so on. They have considerable difficulty with basic literacy and numeracy and their language, communication, personal and social development is affected. Many students with moderate general learning disabilities have great difficulty concentrating on tasks and transferring what they learn from one situation to another. They need simple, direct and clear instruction in order to benefit from the classroom situation.

Some children with moderate learning disabilities can have additional disabilities or conditions, including autism spectrum disorders, medical conditions, physical and/or sensory disabilities, and emotional/behavioural difficulties.

Severe/Profound General Learning Disability

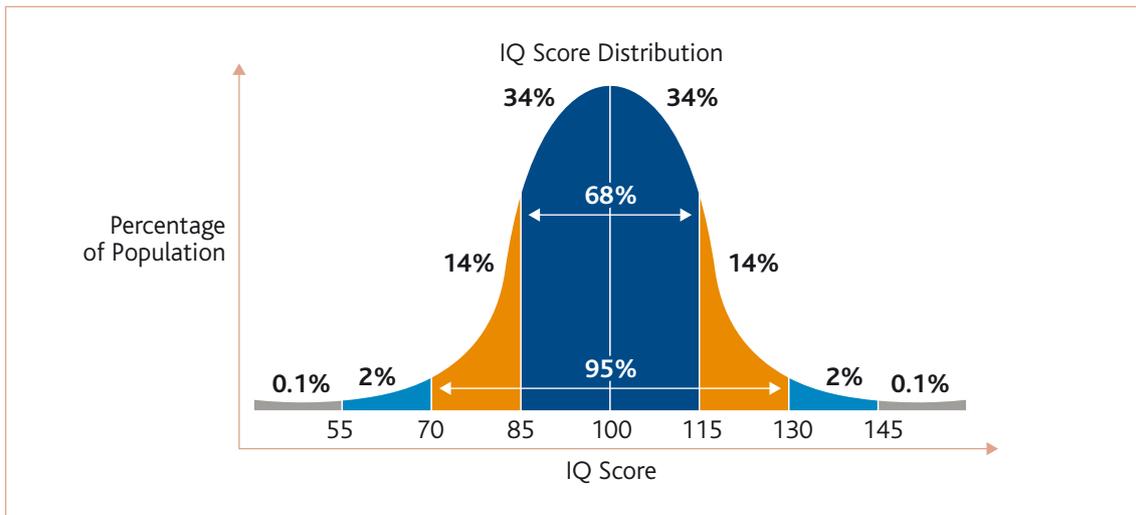
Children with severe/profound general learning disabilities show serious delays in reaching developmental milestones. Their basic awareness and understanding of themselves and the world around them is limited by their level of disability. They usually have considerable difficulties in communicating with other people and the outside world. Many of these children have additional disabilities or conditions, including autism spectrum disorders, medical conditions, physical and/or sensory disabilities, and emotional/behavioural difficulties.

Children with severe/profound general learning disabilities depend on others throughout their lives to help them with basic needs such as mobility, communication, feeding and toileting.

Categories of General Learning Disability

An IQ score can be used as an indicator of intellectual functioning: the higher the score, the higher the functioning. An average IQ score is taken to be within the range of 90-110, with 100 as the mean or average score. About 68% of people have an IQ score that lies somewhere between 85 and 115. Only 2% of people would be expected to have an IQ score of less than 70.

What is a Learning Disability?



On standardised tests of intelligence, categories of general learning disability are defined as:

Mild GLD: IQ score of between 50 and 70 on a standardised intelligence test

Moderate GLD: IQ score of between 35 and 49 on a standardised intelligence test

Severe/Profound GLD: IQ score of less than 35 on a standardised intelligence test.

A formal diagnosis of a general learning disability also requires that a student is experiencing a significant impairment in the area of adaptive functioning or general life skills.

Specific Learning Disability

A specific learning disability is quite different to a general learning disability. A child with a specific learning disability has difficulty in a particular area of learning such as reading, writing, spelling or mathematics. Their difficulties are very specific and are not due to other causes such as their general ability being below average, defective sight or hearing, emotional factors or a physical condition. The difficulties experienced by a person can range from mild to severe.

Specific learning disabilities include:

- dyslexia which is a difficulty in learning to read. This may mean that the child finds it hard to learn to read words or to understand what is written.
- dyscalculia which is a difficulty with numbers and mathematical ability. This may mean that the child finds it hard to understand how numbers work or learn to count or add, subtract, multiply and divide.
- dyspraxia which is a difficulty in planning and carrying out sequences of coordinated motor activity. Verbal dyspraxia relates to difficulties in coordinating the movements needed to make speech sounds. Motor dyspraxia affects the planning and execution of movements in a coordinated manner.

In Summary:

A general learning disability affects most aspects of a child's development including learning, language and activities of daily living. A general learning disability can be at a mild, moderate or severe/profound level. Children with general learning disabilities find it more difficult to learn than other children but can continue to learn throughout their lives.

A specific learning disability affects one particular aspect of learning e.g. reading, writing, mathematics, motor development.

4. How are Educational Needs Assessed?

First steps

In most cases the key to providing children with a good start is early assessment and intervention. Parents/guardians see their child's development at first hand and are most likely to notice if learning is not progressing well. In some cases though, learning or other disabilities may not become apparent until a child is already in school.

If you feel your child may have special educational needs and requires support you should speak first to your public health nurse (PHN) and/or GP who will provide advice and guidance to you.

The Early Years

When difficulties emerge, young children may be referred to a community based therapy service or to an early intervention team by GPs or public health nurses or through self-referral by their parent(s). In these cases, the children's needs are assessed as part of this service. In the early years, the main focus of the HSE assessment and intervention is on the child's health.

Parents of children born after June 1st 2002 can apply for their child to have an assessment under the Disability Act 2005, if they think that their child may have a disability.

Children who qualify for an assessment of need under the Act have a right to:

- Assessment of their health and education needs arising from their disability
- An assessment report
- A statement of the services they will receive
- Make a complaint if they are not happy with any part of the process.

Parents can apply to the HSE, through their Assessment Officer, for this independent and free assessment of need. If the assessment officer finds that your child has additional learning/care needs he/she informs the NCSE.

A list of local HSE offices is available from the HSE website at: <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/LHO/>.

Children of School-Going Age

If your child is already at primary school, and you feel that s/he is having difficulty in the areas of learning or socialisation, the first thing to do is speak to the class teacher and/or school principal. If your child is in a post-primary school you should contact the class tutor or year head or principal. Good communication with your child's school will help to identify special educational needs as early as possible.

The National Educational Psychological Service (often known as NEPS) is a service that supports schools in meeting the needs of children with special educational needs. NEPS has developed a system of identifying and supporting children, known as the Continuum of Support. This system involves gathering information, planning ways of helping and reviewing progress. The Continuum of Support works at three different levels – in primary schools the levels are called, 'Classroom Support', 'School Support' and 'School Support Plus'. In post primary schools the three levels of support are called 'Support for All', 'School Support (for some)' and 'School Support Plus (for a few)'.

Classroom Support/Support for All is really about effective classroom teaching and early identification. Teachers are encouraged to adjust their teaching (called differentiation) to take account of children's different needs and abilities. Schools also help children by having systems in place which support the learning and social development of all students. This can be done in a variety of ways. It might be a buddy system for new first years in a secondary school or a Student of the Week reward system in a primary classroom.

School Support (for some) is needed when what is being done in the ordinary classroom is not enough to meet the needs of the child. Often a special education teacher is involved and some students, or groups of students get extra help. This help could be in a number of areas, such as help with reading or maths, or help with play skills or language. Children getting this kind of help usually have a Support Plan.

School Support Plus (for a few) is generally for children with complex and/or enduring needs. Relatively few students need this level of support. They might need a particular programme of help, with individual supports and specialist interventions. Children getting this kind of help usually have a Support Plan or Individual Education Plan.

NEPS psychologists are most likely to engage in direct work with the students, parent and teachers at School Support Plus level. Further detail on the continuum of support is available on www.education.ie.

If you think your child may need to be seen by a NEPS psychologist, you should begin by discussing your child's needs with the teacher and/or school principal. Not every child needs to meet the psychologist in person. Each school makes referrals to their NEPS psychologist, who helps the school to plan the work.

At present, the formal educational assessment of school-going children is generally carried out by NEPS, or privately arranged where NEPS psychologists are not available or where parents choose to do so privately. Other assessments, such as Speech and Language or Occupational Therapy are carried out under community services at local health offices. <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/LHO/>.

In Summary:

The class teacher plays a key role in assessing, supporting and teaching children with special educational needs. They are supported in their work by special education support teachers. Other professionals may become involved to provide further in-depth assessment to highlight students' learning strengths and needs, where this is required.

5. What is an Inclusive Approach to Education?

Inclusive education means helping every student to achieve the most from school and encouraging each student to take a meaningful part in the everyday activity of the school. Inclusive education is not just about the particular school or class a student attends. It is also about what goes on *in* that school or class.

The key message in the EPSEN Act is that students with special educational needs should be educated, wherever possible, in an inclusive environment with students who do not have special educational needs. The EPSEN Act goes on to clarify that there are two exceptions to this commitment to educate all students together in an inclusive environment.

The first exception is where an assessment, carried out under the EPSEN Act, finds that this would not be in the best interests of the student with special needs. The second is where this would be inconsistent with the effective provision of education for other students with whom the student is to be educated.

In the vast majority of cases mainstream schools are now the first choice for parents of children with special educational needs. Fewer than 1 per cent of students in Ireland now attend a special school. However, there are exceptional cases where attending a mainstream class may not be in the best interest of the student, or may be inconsistent with the effective provision of education for other students with whom the student is to be educated. In these cases, a special setting may be best suited to the student's needs.

In Summary:

Inclusive education means that the system adjusts to meet students' needs, rather than expecting students to 'fit' into the system.

Most students with special educational needs in Ireland are educated in mainstream schools. Special schools and classes are available in cases where parents/professionals consider that mainstream education is not the most appropriate option for their child.

6. Pre-School Children

Children are required by Irish law to start their education by the age of 6 years.

Since January 2010 the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme funds early childhood care and education for all children, including children with special educational needs, regardless of family income or ability to pay. The ECCE Programme is available for up to 15 hours per week (3 hrs per day x 5days) for a maximum of 38 weeks per year for two years.

Children must be 2 years 8 months by September of the year they enroll. Detailed information on the ECCE scheme is available on the website of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs at: www.dcy.gov.ie.

A new model, the Better Start **Access and Inclusion Model** (AIM) was introduced from September 2016 to support young children with disabilities to access the ECCE programme. AIM is a child-centred model, involving seven levels of progressive support, moving from universal supports for all children to more targeted supports for some children, based on the needs of the child and the service provider. The model offers tailored, practical supports based on children's needs and does not require a formal diagnosis of disability. More information on the AIM model is available on the website of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) at: <http://aim.gov.ie/>.

The State also supports early intervention for some children with special educational needs through providing funding to a number of crèche/pre-school settings including:

- Early intervention settings attached to mainstream and special schools
- Early intervention settings attached to HSE funded service providers
- Private pre-school settings supported by HSE grant aid
- Home Tuition.

Your child can access one or more of the above mentioned early intervention settings where you meet the eligibility criteria for support and if the service is available in your area. Eligibility criteria for education-funded settings are available on the website of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) at: <http://www.education.ie>.

Children who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing or have a serious visual impairment are generally referred to specialist visual impairment and audiology services at an early age. From there they are referred to a visiting teacher.

The service provided by visiting teachers includes:

- guidance, support and specialist teaching to pre-school children and their parents in the home
- specialist teaching, support and monitoring in schools
- guidance to parents and teachers on developing communication skills
- advice regarding the development of Braille skills
- advice to parents and teachers on the use of assistive technology, including sound-field systems, FM systems, adaptive technology, low vision aids
- liaising with parents, teachers and professionals including audiologists, speech and language therapists, SENOs, cochlear implant team.

In Summary:

Pre-school children with special educational needs can attend their local mainstream preschool through the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme.

The State also supports early intervention for some children with special educational needs through providing funding to special crèche/pre-school settings.

Visiting Teachers are available to support children who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing and those who are Blind/Visually impaired.

7. School-Aged Children

The compulsory school age in Ireland is 6 but children from the age of 4 can be enrolled in infant classes in primary schools. Early childhood education is generally understood to include junior and senior infant classes in primary schools.

Children assessed as having special educational needs come to school with a wide range of different needs. A particular disability may not affect learning in a way that means a child needs extra educational support, or indeed it may not affect the capacity for learning at all.

Many children with special educational needs can therefore be fully included in mainstream classes without any additional teaching or care supports. Others may need additional teaching and/or care assistance and/or assistive technology to support them in mainstream classes. Some children, with greater needs, may benefit from being placed in a special class in mainstream schools where there are smaller numbers of students in the class. Other children, with complex needs, may need the support of a special school.

An Irish-medium school ('gaelscoil' or Gaeltacht school) is a school in which everything is done through Irish using a system of 'immersion education'. This is a system that helps children to become fluent in Irish naturally, because they spend every day in an Irish-speaking environment. All subjects, apart from English are taught through Irish. Irish is also the language of communication in the school, both inside and outside the classroom and in the playground.

There are three main types of education provision available to primary and post-primary students with special educational needs. These are:

- A **mainstream class** in a mainstream primary or post-primary school where the class or subject teacher has primary responsibility for the progress of all students in the class, including students with special educational needs. Additional teaching support from a special education teacher may be provided, where appropriate.
- **Special classes** in mainstream schools offer a supportive learning environment for students with more complex needs where mainstream classes would not, or have not been able to, meet their needs. In order to be placed in a special class a child must have a professional report stating that he/she has a special educational need and that this need is of such complexity that a special class placement could be considered.

Special classes have a lower student-teacher ratio specified according to category of disability. This means that classes have small numbers of students, for example, a special class for children with moderate general learning disabilities will have one teacher for every eight children.

Placement in a special class is a flexible arrangement that may change as a student's learning develops. Where possible, students in special classes should be educated alongside mainstream peers for some part of the day or week, or for some activities or subjects, in line with their needs and abilities.

- **Special schools** support students with more severe and/or complex special educational needs in cases where a full time mainstream placement would not be in the student's best interest. These students may find the demands of mainstream schools very difficult. In order to be placed in a special school a child must have a professional report stating that he/she has a special educational need and that this need is of such complexity that a special school placement could be considered.

Special schools tend to have fewer students. They have a lower student-teacher ratio specified according to category of disability. This means that classes have small numbers of students. A special school for students with a moderate general learning disability for example, has one teacher for every eight students.

This range of provision is sometimes described as a **continuum** (of provision), from fully inclusive mainstream classes at one end of the continuum, to placement in a special school at the other.

Wherever a child is placed the current thinking is that educational placements should be flexible rather than rigid or permanent. There should ideally be some opportunities for students to integrate with peers without special educational needs.

During their school life, children may move from one setting to another as they get older or as differing needs, strengths or abilities emerge. It is important that educational placements are kept under review by the school, parents and other professionals involved. Children with special educational needs should be facilitated to move from one placement to another, where this is appropriate to meet their changing needs and abilities.

A range of additional supports may be made available to schools for students with special educational needs in each of the above settings. These additional supports are outlined in the next section.

In Summary:

There are three types of provision to meet the range of educational needs found among students in primary and post-primary schools. These are:

- mainstream classes in mainstream school
- special classes in mainstream school and
- special schools.

Wherever a child is placed, educational placements should be flexible. Educational placements should be reviewed periodically as a student's needs change.

8. What Supports are Available for Your Child in School?

In all primary and post-primary mainstream classes, students with special educational needs access an appropriate school curriculum, differentiated where necessary, by fully qualified and professional teachers. The term 'differentiated curriculum' is explained on page 32 of this booklet.

A certain number of these students, who have more complex needs, will have access to individualised education programmes. Students with additional care needs may have access to a special needs assistant (SNA), where this is necessary and appropriate.

Additional Teaching Supports in Mainstream Schools

All students with special educational needs in mainstream schools are taught primarily by the class or subject teacher. The fact that your child has special educational needs does not automatically mean that a school needs additional resources in order to provide an inclusive and appropriate education to your child.

Some students with learning or special educational needs may need additional teaching and/or other supports. The DES provides additional teaching support to all primary and post-primary schools for these students to build on, and complement, the education delivered by the class teacher.

Irish-medium schools also routinely provide education for students with all types of special educational needs including, for example, sensory, communication, physical and learning needs. The DES policy is that the NCSE provides the same level of support, for students with special educational needs, to Irish-medium schools as to all other schools.

From September 2017, students do not need to have a formal diagnosis of disability to avail of additional teaching supports in schools. Using the NEPS Continuum of Support model, schools will identify students who require additional support and will assign appropriate support to them.

All children will receive additional teaching support if the school using its school based assessment and the Neps Continuum of Support, identifies that a child has learning needs.

How is Teaching Support Provided in Mainstream Schools and Classes?

All additional teaching support given to your child should build on and complement the support delivered by the class/subject teacher in the ordinary classroom situation. Effective additional teaching support can be provided to your child in a number of different ways including:

- Your child being part of a small group within the ordinary classroom
- Your child being withdrawn as part of a small group to another classroom
- Your child being taught on a one to one basis

What supports are available for your child in school?

- Your child is taught as part of a class where team teaching is taking place. [Team teaching is where the special education teacher goes into a class with the class teacher and they share the planning and delivery of the class.]

Research shows that there is no one of the above models that suits all children with special educational needs for all of their school life. Most schools are flexible and may use all of the models described above, in different combinations. The school will take the particular needs of individual children into account when planning how best to provide support to them.

Special Education Teachers in Mainstream Schools

Special education teachers provide additional teaching to children with special educational needs in a number of different ways including:

- assessing and recording the child's needs and progress
- setting specific, time-related targets for each child and agreeing these with the class teacher and principal
- teaching the children, either with the rest of the child's class or in a separate room
- advising class teachers about differentiating the curriculum to suit different children
- meeting with and advising parents, accompanied by the class teacher, as needed
- meeting other professionals such as psychologists, speech and language therapists, visiting teachers in relation to a child's special educational needs.

Special Needs Assistant Support in Mainstream Classes in Mainstream Schools

All schools can apply to the NCSE for Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support to assist with the additional and significant **care needs** that some students with disabilities may have. This can include helping with activities such as toileting, dressing, feeding, medication and mobility. All students, particularly those with special educational needs, must be taught directly by a class teacher. It is not the role of the SNA to teach students, as SNAs are not qualified teachers.

SNAs provide care support to children assessed as needing such assistance to attend school. They are a school based resource and are usually shared with other children with care needs in the school. They do not therefore act as a personal assistant to the individual child.

The SNA helps children to develop independent living skills so that they are able to interact, as much as possible, with their classmates and peers. It is important that students do not become over dependent on adult SNA support. As children grow and develop and become more independent, they may need less SNA support as they progress through school.

What supports are available for your child in school?

Applications for special needs assistant support can be made where a student has –

- a significant medical need for care assistance
- a significant impairment of physical or sensory function or
- where the care needs specified relate to significant behavioural disturbance.

In the case of behavioural related care needs, SNA support is only provided where it is clear that the school's usual behavioural management strategies have not been successful to date. Schools must also demonstrate how access to SNA support can assist with ongoing planning and intervention for the student.

When applying for SNA support, the school must send relevant professional reports which confirm that the child has a disability or medical needs; recommends additional adult support; and describes the nature and extent of the child's care needs.

Schools are also asked to consider the importance of balancing the need of the child for necessary care support and the right of the child to acquire personal independence skills (For more information, see DES Circular Sp. Ed. 0030/14).

SENOs allocate SNA support to the school, on a full time or part time basis, on the basis of individual applications and in accordance with current DES policy. The duties of the SNA are of a non-teaching nature. The school must arrange to use its SNA staff to meet the care needs of all the students who have been identified as needing assistance.

Transfer of Supports from Mainstream Primary to Post Primary School

The additional supports that your child receives in primary school do not automatically transfer to post-primary (secondary) school. This is because children's needs change over time and they may require a greater or lesser amount of support to manage in a post-primary school.

When your child is transferring from primary to post-primary, the post-primary principal must apply for SNA support to the NCSE. In order to do this, the post-primary school will need up to date professional reports about your child. You may have the relevant reports already from primary school, but you may need to have them updated as your child's care needs may have changed. As children's care needs diminish and they become more independent, a key goal in providing SNA support in the first place has been achieved. It is then possible to reduce the level of SNA support required by the child as they enter post primary school.

In Summary:

In mainstream classes:

- The class/subject teacher can differentiate the curriculum to meet the student's learning needs.
- The class/subject teacher can develop a plan to guide a student's progress over time.
- All primary and post-primary schools have additional teaching supports to complement the work of the classroom teacher for students with learning support or special educational needs.
- All schools can apply to the NCSE for Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for students with additional, significant care needs arising from a disability.

Special Settings (Special Classes in Mainstream Schools and Special Schools)

These are some children whose complex special educational needs significantly affect their capacity to learn to the extent that it is not possible for them to be educated in a mainstream setting. These children can receive their education in a special school or in a special class in a mainstream school.

Supports in Special Settings

Special schools and classes have a reduced student/teacher ratio to assist the school in meeting the educational needs of the children who attend. Increased capitation grants are also paid to special schools and to mainstream schools with special classes. In addition, special schools and classes may be given a baseline allocation of SNAs per class, to reflect the profile of care needs expected in the class.

What supports are available for your child in school?

Additional SNA support may also be sanctioned by the NCSE for individual children who have significant care needs which require support above that baseline level of support already sanctioned to the school. This additional allocation is reviewed annually and can be adjusted in line with the changing needs of the child.

SENOs will be able to advise parents about the location and services available in the nearest special school or special class.

In Summary:

Special schools and special classes in mainstream schools provide:

- Supportive learning environments for children with more severe and/or complex special educational needs
- Smaller class sizes than a mainstream class
- Care supports for students with additional significant care needs arising from a disability.

Other Supports Available in All School Settings

All schools can apply for the following supports for children, where needed, who are enrolled in mainstream primary and post primary and in special schools and special classes.

Special Transport Scheme

Bus Eireann, on behalf of the DES, operates a school transport scheme for children with special educational needs who are attending the nearest recognised mainstream school or special class or special school, that is or can be resourced, to meet their special educational needs.

Details of the school transport scheme for children with special educational needs are available on the DES website under Services and Information for Parents. Bus escorts may also be provided.

What supports are available for your child in school?

As a general rule, the NCSE advises that students with special educational needs should go to a mainstream school, unless there is professional evidence of complex or severe special needs to indicate that the child needs a special placement.

There are a variety of reasons why a parent may wish to enrol their child in a school other than the nearest school. A parent may wish to send their child to a school with a particular ethos or a school which has particular educational programmes or health-funded supports available.

The availability of school transport is an important factor for parents to consider in these situations as the DES funds transport arrangements only to the nearest recognised school that is or can be resourced to meet the educational needs of the child.

Providing or funding alternative transport to a school a long distance away may be stressful. Family circumstances may also change over time, impacting on the ability of the family to continue such a commitment, so a decision like this needs careful thought and forward planning.

Exceptional circumstances can arise from time to time for any family. Parents need to consider what will happen if they are, through unforeseen circumstances, unable to continue transporting their child with special educational needs to school and should have back-up plans in place for such eventualities.

Other grants that may be available to schools for students with special educational needs include:

- Grants to families of Deaf/Hard of Hearing children for sign language tuition.
- Grants for assistive technology such as radio aids, Braille machines and computers. This scheme is for students with physical and/or communicative disabilities who, without such technological support, would be unable to access the school curriculum (DES, 2013).
- Grants for specialised seating and other furniture.
- Start-up grants for the purchase of equipment and materials in special classes.

Home Tuition Grants

The State funds a home tuition grant scheme for children who are too ill to attend school, or who miss substantial periods of schooling due to illness. This scheme can also be accessed as an interim measure by children with special educational needs who are awaiting an appropriate school placement. Details of the Home Tuition scheme are available on the DES website under Services and Information for Parents.

9. Choosing a School for your Child

As the primary and natural educators of their children, all parents have to choose where their children are to be educated, including the possibility that they will be educated at home.

Choosing a school for your child with special educational needs is a very important decision. There are no absolute indicators or criteria that, on their own, can be used to determine exactly where a child should be placed. The more information you have about the range of provision and supports available, the better your choice is likely to be. The information in this section is intended to assist parents to put their child's needs at the centre of the decision making process.

Parents make the final decision about their child's educational placement but they usually will have spoken to a number of other people in the course of making this decision. They may want to discuss options with their child and include them in the decision-making process for instance. They may want to contact other parents of children with special educational needs for information and advice; and they may wish to consult professionals involved with their child and/or prospective school personnel.

Some parents want to send their child with special educational needs to an Irish-medium school but fear that their child will not be able to make good progress there. A bilingual education (for example, being educated through both Irish and English) has advantages for children because they develop fluency and literacy in two languages, and find it easier to learn other languages.

Children with special educational needs, depending on their individual needs, can do well in bilingual education settings provided that they have a supportive learning environment. This is also the case for monolingual settings. Irish-medium schools welcome children with special educational needs and many of these children make good progress in these settings. The DES policy is that the NCSE provides the same level of support for students with special educational needs to Irish-medium schools as to all other schools.

The Board of Management of every school must publish an admissions policy which sets out the policy of the school concerning the admission and participation of children with special educational needs. The school's enrolment policy must respect the "principles of equality and the right of parents to send their children to a school of the parents' choice" as stated in the Education Act, 1998.

If you choose to educate your child in a place other than a recognised school, for example, home schooling, you must register with the Educational Welfare Services of the Child and Family Agency. The State requires that your child is assessed by an authorised person to ensure that your child is receiving a certain minimum education². An authorised person could be a school inspector, an educational welfare officer or a person appointed by Tusla under the terms of the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000. More information is available on the Tusla website at: <http://www.tusla.ie/services/educational-welfare-services/educational-welfare-service-contacts>.

² Under the Constitution the State must provide for free primary education for children and must ensure that every child receives a "certain minimum education".

Parents are often very concerned about whether it is best for their child with special educational needs to attend a mainstream school or a special school or class. In making this decision, it is helpful to think about which setting is most suited to your child's individual needs and the quality of education that can be provided for your child within that setting.

Mainstream Placement

The level and range of special educational supports now available in Irish schools means that most students with special needs can be enrolled and well supported in their nearest mainstream school.

As noted earlier fewer than 1 per cent of students are educated in special schools in Ireland.

Special Placement

Special placements, either in special classes in mainstream schools or in special schools are suitable for a relatively small proportion of students where there is evidence that this kind of provision is required because of:

- the severity and complexity of the student's special educational needs and/or
- poor educational outcomes being achieved by the student in an existing or previous early intervention, pre-school or school setting and/or
- the communication or socialisation needs of the student and/or
- the student's behaviour impinging negatively on other students in the class and/or
- the student finding the activity levels and bustle of mainstream schools to be very challenging and difficult.

If a special setting is being considered, it is important to think about what outcomes might be achievable in a special setting and whether similar outcomes can be achieved within a mainstream setting.

Young Children with Autism (Three-Five Years)

Deciding to place a young child (three-five years old) in a special setting needs particularly careful consideration.

It may be premature to decide what will work for a young child, as a child's needs may not have fully emerged or may not yet have been comprehensively assessed. In addition, young children may have had little or no opportunity to mix with typically developing peers in a school setting, so their capacity to manage in a mainstream environment may not be known.

However, it is the case that for some young children with very complex special educational needs a placement in a special setting may be appropriate.

Parents' decision about the educational placement of a child with special educational needs usually evolves over a period of time following a process of assessment, intervention and review.

A range of factors should be taken into account such as

- your child's needs
- your child's best interests
- your own preference and
- the needs of other children in the school setting.

Advice from Professionals

Professionals who can assist in the decision making process include principals, teachers, NEPS psychologists, SENOs, Health Service Executive or private psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, psychiatrists, medical doctors and so on.

If you have a psychological or other professional report on your child, it may be of assistance to you as you make this decision. It is always useful to visit the schools that have places available for your child.

- **Professional reports should be based on an objective assessment of educational needs and capacities, and care needs where relevant. They should indicate:**
 - the nature, extent and complexity of the child's special educational need
 - the child's capacity to cope with the placement being proposed
 - the child's levels of academic and adaptive functioning
 - the child's communication, language, social, emotional and developmental progress
 - the child's personal development, life skills and self esteem
 - the child's ability to form friendships, and the likelihood of isolation
 - the child's family context and parental views.
- **Assessments should review and explore interventions and outcomes.**

An assessment of a child can be undertaken by teachers in the school, or where necessary by a NEPS psychologist or by HSE professionals such as a clinical psychologist, speech and language therapist, occupational therapist, psychiatrist and so on.

Assessments should include a rigorous examination of the outcomes achieved by the child from any intervention or support to date. In the case of post-primary schools, the experience of the student in primary or special school should be taken into account. In the case of primary schools, the experience of the child in a pre-school or early intervention setting should be taken into account.

It should also include an evaluation of the interventions that could be put in place within available resources, to support the inclusion of the student in mainstream education.

- **Professionals have a duty to provide clear, comprehensive, objective, and evidence based advice to parents.**

Professionals should provide a report to parents, following the assessment of their child. Such professionals include psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, psychiatrists, and so on. Professional reports may be needed if a parent wishes to enrol a child in a special school or class. They may be needed if the school is applying for care supports for the child.

- **Educational placement options should be presented clearly to parents.**

If a special educational placement is being recommended, the professional's report should set out placement options that could meet the student's needs, explain the available placement options and the implications of those options for discussion with parents.

If a professional report is not clear or if parents do not understand what is written in the report, they should request assistance from the professional who wrote the report.

Other Key Issues to Guide Parents' Decision Making

The decision about where to send your child with special educational needs to school can be a difficult one. When faced with this decision, you may find the following points useful:

- **Mainstream education is the first option for most students with special needs.**

The EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) provides that wherever possible children with special educational needs should be educated in an inclusive environment with other children who do not have such needs. A mainstream educational placement should therefore be the first option considered for most students. A special placement may be recommended for some students with complex or severe needs for whom a mainstream placement may not be in their best interest or the best interest of other students.

- **Education and learning are paramount.**

Assessing the learning needs and the potential of the individual student is of paramount importance. School is an educational setting for the student, and not a childcare placement. Parents and professionals should have high expectations for student learning that are grounded in an understanding of the student's learning needs. Education should challenge all students in a positive way, including those with special educational needs.

- **Visiting schools is important.**

School factors are important and can be explored during a parent's visit to a school. Many schools have open days and parents should find out when the open day is taking place as this is a good opportunity to visit a school. It may also be possible for schools to make other arrangements with parents who require an alternative date.

School factors parents should consider include the school's physical and social environment and distance from home. In the case of special placements, parents may want to explore what curriculum is on offer, what certification options are available and how the placement will be reviewed over time in line with the child's needs.

Physical accessibility in a building is important for students with a physical disability. For example, a student using a wheelchair may need to access the school building via a ramp. A school may need to apply for additional funding for these physical modifications to the DES and time is needed to complete any building work – no matter how minor – and comply with planning regulations.

For a child with a life-threatening condition, ensuring medical support arrangements can be put in place is a crucial consideration for a parent in choosing an educational placement.

- **Distance to be travelled is important.**

Parents need to take into account the distance to be travelled to school. Some journeys can involve the student leaving home at a very early hour and arriving home late in the evening. Younger students, in particular, can find travelling tiring and tiredness may then inhibit their ability to take part fully in school or to enjoy family life.

It can sometimes be counterproductive for children to travel away from their own community to attend a special school as they then do not know other children in their local area and can feel isolated in their communities.

- **A decision to move schools requires careful thought and planning.**

When a new special school/class opens in a region closer to the student's home, parents may wish to consider moving their child nearer home. Moving school is a big decision for any student and may be particularly stressful for a student with special educational needs, even when the move might prove beneficial, both from an educational and practical viewpoint.

Moving school can also result in additional costs for parents e.g. different school uniform, books etc. In these circumstances, it is advised that parents should take adequate time to consider and prepare for this move.

When applying to enrol your child, it is important that you give schools relevant information about your child's special educational needs. This enables the school to prepare, in advance, for your child's arrival in the school.

As your child grows and develops, and their needs change, you can review this decision. A child can move from special into mainstream education and back during their school career.

- **SENOs provide a valuable local service.**

Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs) can provide valuable support and information to parents during the decision making process, for example on the location of schools, the criteria governing access to additional supports, the application process and so on. SENOs will inform you about where there are places available for your child in local schools – but ultimately it is up to you to decide where you wish to send your child to school.

From time to time, parents may experience a delay in finding a school place for a child with special educational needs. This may be for a number of reasons. For example, the opening of a special class may be delayed if a school building is not ready; a school may refuse to enrol a child and an appeals process may be underway; or a child may have moved to a new location where there are no school places available.

If your child has complex special educational needs, or you are having difficulty finding a placement for a child with special educational needs, you should contact the local SENO for advice. The role of the SENO is explained on page 44. Your school will provide you with the contact details for your local SENO which are also available on the NCSE website at www.ncse.ie.

In Summary:

Points for parents to consider when choosing a school for their child with special educational needs:

1. Students with special educational needs should generally go to a mainstream school, unless there is professional evidence of complex or severe special needs to indicate that the child needs a specialist placement.
2. Parents can find it helpful to talk to other parents, their child, teachers, SENOs, and other professionals with whom their child is involved, for example psychologists, speech and language therapists.
3. Parents should feel confident to use also their own knowledge of their child's learning and social needs.
4. It is important for parents to attend open evenings when available and to speak to the principal and teachers in the school and to attend open evenings when available.
5. Parents may find it useful to consider if:
 - a. They know all the placement options available and how they will benefit their child.
 - b. They have thought about sending their child to a mainstream school.
 - c. Their child will be challenged to learn, in a positive way, in the chosen school.
 - d. They need to contact the local SENO for advice about the availability of local placements, how to apply to a school etc.
 - e. The necessary assessments have taken place.
 - f. They clearly understand what the professional report is saying about their child's needs.

10. What Will Your Child Learn at School?

Primary Schools

Every child is unique, with individual strengths and learning needs. Child-centeredness is at the core of the Primary school curriculum. This recognises that there are different kinds of learning and that children learn in different ways. It means that the curriculum and the methods used to teach the curriculum in primary school are broad and flexible so that the needs, abilities and interests of the individual child can be accommodated.

The primary curriculum is designed in such a way that teachers can 'differentiate' it for different children. Differentiation means that teachers adapt lessons or tasks so that children with special educational needs can participate in and benefit from the curriculum at a level and pace that best suits their own learning style and needs.

Details of the curriculum for all primary schools are available on the NCCA website (www.ncca.ie).

Post-Primary Schools

Almost all students with special educational needs follow Junior Cycle programmes leading to the Junior Certificate (level 3 on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications) at the end of the third year of junior cycle when students are 15-16 years of age. The NCCA is now developing new curriculum and assessment specifications for subjects in the Junior cycle. The NCCA has also developed Junior Cycle Programmes at levels 1 and 2 on the National Framework of Qualifications. These programmes are devised for students with learning disabilities from low functioning mild general learning disability to severe and profound. Level 1 is almost exclusively taught in special schools whereas Level 2 can be offered in mainstream and special schools.

Schools may offer the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) to students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds and those viewed at risk of leaving school early. The JCSP attempts to create conditions through which the young people concerned can have a positive experience of school and achieve success.

Junior Cycle is followed by a two or three year Senior Cycle depending on whether the optional Transition Year is taken. Transition Year is available in many post primary schools. It immediately follows the Junior Cycle and provides an opportunity for students to experience a wide range of educational inputs, including work experience, over the course of a year that is free from formal exams.

During the final two years of Senior Cycle students can take one of three programmes, each leading to a State Exam. These three programmes are the:

- Traditional Leaving Certificate (Established),
- Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and
- Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA).

What will your child learn at school?

Each of the three programmes has different aims and a different focus. The ways that students are assessed also varies across the three programmes.

Details of the curriculum in post-primary schools are available on the NCCA website at www.ncca.ie.

Also available in a small number of schools is ASDAN. This is a UK based approved awarding body which creates opportunities for learners to achieve personal and social development through the achievement of a wide range of ASDAN Awards and Qualifications. A number of the awards have been developed for learners with moderate, severe, complex, profound or multiple learning difficulties. These awards are available in a small number of special schools in Ireland.

Reasonable Accommodation in Certificate Examinations

The State Examinations Commission (SEC) operates the Reasonable Accommodation in Certificate Examinations (RACE) scheme. This scheme is to enable students with special educational needs to access the state examinations on an equal basis with other students. Applications for the RACE Scheme can be made on one of four grounds as follows:

- Learning Difficulty
- Hearing Difficulty
- Visual Difficulty
- Physical Difficulty (this includes physical, medical, sensory, mental health and behavioural difficulties).

A range of accommodations are available for students under each of the above grounds, e.g. a reader, special examination centre, waiver from the assessment of spelling, grammar and punctuation in language subjects, use of a word processor, Braille version of examination paper and so on.

Full details of the scheme are available on the website of the State Examination Commission: https://www.examinations.ie/schools/cs_view.php?q=746932c1559a1f720973fca784ec3417af46b516.

Education Plans

An Education Plan is a written plan that guides a child's learning and progress. Education plans set out the learning goals to be achieved by a child over a certain time period and list the teaching strategies, resources and supports that are needed to help a child to reach those goals. The education plan gives a focus to the agreed outcomes that children with special educational needs should achieve while in school and allows their progress to be recorded. It should be developed and reviewed by teachers in conjunction with parents, students and where necessary, with others involved in your child's learning.

When the EPSEN Act 2004 is fully commenced, it will provide a right for children with special educational needs to have an education plan. Although this section of the Act has not as yet been brought into force, many teachers and schools already use individualised education planning in their work with children with more complex special educational needs.

The NCSE has produced a booklet entitled 'Guidelines on the Individual Education Plan Process' (2006). This guide to good practice in relation to the preparation, implementation and review of IEPs is available on the NCSE website at www.ncse.ie.

In Summary:

Every child is unique, with individual strengths and learning needs. Children should therefore have access to a range of different teaching approaches and learning programmes to meet their individual needs.

11. Planning for Transitions

“Transition” is the process of moving from one stage or place to another. Transitions occur throughout your child’s school life – from:

- Home to pre-school
- Pre-school to primary
- Primary to post-primary
- Post primary to further or higher education and/or
- Education to adult life.

Transitions sometimes occur between mainstream schools offering similar provision, for example, if a child moves house. They can also occur between mainstream and special education settings (special classes and special schools). These transitions require thoughtful planning, communication and participation from you, your child, teachers, and other professionals, as necessary. This advance planning will help your child to make the transition from one stage to the next.

The NCSE has published guidelines for parents on the transition of students with special educational needs, namely:

- Starting School
- Changing School: Moving from Primary to Post-Primary
- Changing Schools: Moving between Special and Mainstream School
- Planning for Life after School.

Some of the main responsibilities of parents and schools in bringing about successful transitions are summarised below. A full set of the guidelines are available from your SENO or on the NCSE website at: <http://ncse.ie/information-booklets-pamphlets-2>.

Parent Responsibilities

When considering a school placement, parents of children with complex special educational needs are strongly advised to engage with the school and the local SENO at the earliest opportunity, certainly once a decision on a school has been made, but it is even better to make contact earlier. This enables both the school and parents to openly discuss the needs of the child and to plan for the child’s enrolment. For example, the school may need to make applications for adaptations to the building unit or additional teaching and/or SNA support and/or training courses for teachers may need to be organised by the school. The school needs time, and advance notice, to put such arrangements in place.

Parents are therefore advised to:

- Engage with the local SENO at the earliest possible opportunity
- Apply in good time to enrol their child in school
- Establish, with the school and SENO, the reports required to support applications for additional supports, if necessary
- Provide the school with all relevant information (any assessments, reports from pre-school settings, school reports, medical requirements etc.) on their child's special needs in good time to allow for planning
- Plan their child's change from pre-school to primary school or primary to post-primary school (many children benefit from additional preparation to smooth the transition process)
- Be open with professionals and school staff
- Work with schools to ensure that there is a consistent home-school approach.

A parent may have a particular preference for a school e.g. the closest school or a school they attended themselves. In these cases, parents are strongly advised to contact the school to establish:

- If there is a place available in the school?
- What educational programmes are available or could be provided in the school?
- What supports are available, or could be made available, to the school to support their child's needs?
- What training does the staff require to meet the needs of the student? For example, if a child communicates solely through Irish Sign Language (ISL) is there a teacher in place who can use ISL? If not, can such training be put in place?

If a school refuses to enrol a child with special educational needs, parents can appeal to the Department of Education and Skills under Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 (Government of Ireland, 1998).

In addition the NCSE has developed an internal appeals process for schools who wish to appeal a decision on the allocation of additional supports to schools. The details of this appeals process are available on the NCSE website³.

The EPSEN Act also contains important sections that refer to assessments, education plans and appeals that parents can initiate. These sections of the EPSEN Act are not yet active however, as they have not officially commenced.

³ Please see: <http://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/Appeal-against-Permanent-Exclusion-Suspension-or-Refusal-to-Enrol/Appeal-against-Permanent-Exclusion-Suspension-or-Refusal-to-Enrol.html>

The Education (Admissions to schools) Act 2018 has been enacted this year. Section 8 has particular reference to students with special educational needs. This Act states that a school shall not discriminate in its admission of a student to a school on the grounds of disability or special educational needs.

School Responsibilities

All schools should welcome students with special educational needs in line with the DES national policy on an inclusive approach to education. In particular, schools should check that their enrolment policies comply with all legislative requirements, see Appendix 1 for some of the key references.

Schools should ensure that information is available to parents about supports available in the school to assist their child to learn and achieve outcomes in line with his/her own ability. This information should be made available on school websites and through other means.

Schools should provide information to parents on how the NEPS Continuum of Support (a staged process of assessment, intervention and review) works in their school. This will help inform parents' decisions on the ongoing placement of their child with special educational needs.

Schools should use an individualised planning process, with meaningful learning targets and measurable outcomes in place for each student, to ensure access to the curriculum and the recording of progress over time.

In summary schools should ensure that they have:

- a flexible enrolment policy which enables early planning for students with special educational needs
- met with parents to agree the enrolment of the child and discuss his/her special educational needs and how they might be met
- advised parents of the nature of any documentation required e.g. assessment or medical reports
- arranged for teacher training if particular interventions are required
- applied for SNA support, where necessary, in line with the closing dates for the relevant scheme
- ensured that the school building is 'accessible' as necessary
- applied for any assistive technology and/or specialist equipment which may be needed by the child

- applied for special transport arrangements, if necessary
- liaised with the visiting teacher, as appropriate
- consulted with the NEPS psychologist when a change of placement is being considered (e.g. a move in or out of a special class or school).

Flexibility, Review and Evaluation of School Placements

Students mature and develop differently. Their learning and support needs change. Some require more support when they are younger. Others when they are older. Students with special educational needs benefit and develop as a result of support and interventions provided in schools. For all of these reasons, educational placements must be kept under regular review.

Parents and schools are advised to ensure that children are being served well by their school placement. There should be flexibility so that students' educational placements can change as their individual needs change over time.

A move into a special class or a special school is not a placement of last resort or a permanent arrangement. It is an option exercised in line with a student's needs and best interests at a particular point in time. Other options may be more appropriate when needs change or capacities develop. It can be difficult to assess the most appropriate placement for a young child so particular flexibility is required to allow young children to change placement, as required. Some children can begin in a special school and may then be able to transfer into a mainstream school later on. Some may start life in mainstream school in a special class and move gradually to a mainstream class. Similarly some children may manage mainstream when younger and move to a special placement in line with their needs later on.

Schools should review a student's education plan annually (or more often if necessary). The review should involve school personnel, parents and students. The SENO and NEPS psychologist or other professionals may also be involved, if required.

When a review is carried out, and where alternative options are being considered, schools should seek a consultation with their NEPS psychologist. Schools and parents should also contact their SENO so that they may be advised of any changes in facilities in the local area.

In Summary:

- The local mainstream school is the first option for most children with special educational needs
- If you have evidence that your child may need a special setting, find out what are all the available options for your child
- If your child is starting or changing school, apply to have your child enrolled in all schools in your locality
- Apply in good time to enrol your child in school
- Find out what, if any, documentation is necessary and be ready to provide whatever reports are required
- Contact your local SENO for advice and information as early as possible
- Contact details for SENOs are available on the NCSE website (www.ncse.ie) or through your local primary or post-primary school. You can contact the SENO dealing with your area by email or by phone or by letter
- Allow sufficient time for all the necessary planning to take place when your child is starting or changing schools.

Remember!

A successful transition depends on the ability of all those involved to plan ahead, to communicate effectively and to share information about the child/young person.

12. How as a Parent You can Support your Child

Parents as Partners in Education

As a parent, you are actively involved in many important discussions and decisions to support your children throughout school life. For your child with special needs, this can include gathering information to help decide which school your child will attend, participating in the assessment process and the educational planning process and helping your child to make transitions from one setting to another. Many of these issues have been discussed already in this booklet.

Everyday School Life

Parents also have an important role to play in everyday school life. As parents, you can help your child to develop an organised approach to learning. Taking an interest in your child's day at school builds trust and an open relationship between you. This will serve you both well if any problems arise at school.

You can help your child to develop organisational and time management skills. For instance, you can help your child to develop a homework pattern by encouraging them to draw up a homework timetable. You can assist with homework and ask questions about how it is going and what they are learning. If, over time, you are concerned that your child is having problems or is taking a long time to complete homework it is important to make contact with his/her class teacher.

Parents can also encourage children to prepare for the next day at school by helping them to gather what they need such as equipment, uniform, lunch and so on.

Joining after school activities can help build a rounded and confident child. You can encourage your child to join some after school clubs or get involved in some activities – drama, sports, music, debating. This may also require your help with transport, equipment, rearranging the dinner schedule and so on.

Stay in Contact with your Child's School

Good home-school communication is very important and helps schools to do what is best for your child. Each school has its own way of communicating with parents and will use a form of communication best suited to the particular school, its parents and students. Many school websites have a specific section dedicated to providing information for parents.

Schools usually issue notices or newsletters, through the children, to communicate general information to parents. Reading school newsletters is a good way to learn about what is happening at school and about the activities in which you and your child can be involved. It is important that you check your child's schoolbag regularly for notes. If left unchecked younger children may produce notes weeks after they are relevant!

How as a parent can you support your child?

All schools hold parent-teacher meetings at some stage during the school year. Attending these will help you keep in touch with your child's progress. It also shows your child that you are interested in his/her progress in school.

A parent-teacher meeting enables you to:

- discuss how your child is progressing, both academically and socially
- see examples of your child's work
- get to know your child's teacher/s
- keep informed about plans for your child's future learning.

At least once a year, parents usually receive a written school report on their child. These student reports provide an overview of how well your child is doing at school.

Each school has an agreed **code of behaviour**. The principal of the school will provide parents with a copy of this code and will enlist parents' co-operation in ensuring this code is followed.

All schools must have a written school plan which parents may request to view, if they so wish.

How can Parents Communicate with Schools?

It is important that parents give schools relevant information about their child's special educational needs to assist the school to meet their particular needs. If your child is experiencing a particular problem in school you need to inform the teacher about this. There may also be times when you may want to let the teacher know about something that is affecting your child outside the school situation. It can help the teacher to understand a child who is upset if the teacher knows what the difficulty is about.

If you feel your child has a problem at school, try at first to learn more from your child. Communicating with your child builds and maintains trust and honesty. If you still have concerns about your child, you should make an arrangement to see the teacher. By making an appointment, the teacher can organise for the class to be supervised while you meet. This means that the teacher can give you his or her full attention.

What if You are not Satisfied with Your Child's Education/ Development?

If you have concerns about your child's learning or development then it is best to try to sort out these issues in the first instance with your child's teachers and school principal. They are best placed to work with you to help resolve the problem.

If your concerns are not resolved at this stage you may contact the Chairperson of the school's Board of Management.

In Summary:

Your knowledge, views and experiences as a parent are vital in helping your child to develop. Your child is most likely to make progress if you work together in partnership with your child's school and other professionals.

13. What Organisations are There to Support Your Child?

An outline of the State Bodies and their agencies with responsibility for supporting the education of children with special educational needs is given below in Figure 1 below. More detailed information on these organisations and their responsibilities is provided in Appendix 3.

Figure 1: State Bodies and Agencies and their Responsibilities

Department of Education and Skills – its Services and Agencies	
DES Inspectorate	Inspects and evaluates the quality of schooling, advises on educational policy and supports teacher and school management. http://www.education.ie/home .
DES Special Education Section	The Special Education Section of the Department of Education and Skills provides for a range of resources and supports for learners with special educational needs and also develops associated policy in the area of special educational needs, in conjunction with relevant stakeholders. More information is available on: http://www.education.ie/home .
National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)	<p>NEPS psychologists specialise in working with the school community in both primary and post-primary schools. They are concerned with learning, behaviour, social and emotional development. Each psychologist is assigned to a group of schools.</p> <p>NEPS psychologists work in partnership with teachers, parents and children in identifying and supporting children with special educational needs. They assist parents to explore a range of educational options for students with more complex needs. They advise and support schools in developing and reviewing educational and behavioural plans, particularly at key transition points. They liaise with relevant health and other professionals involved with the child.</p> <p>When a change of placement is being considered (e.g. a move in or out of a special class or school) schools are advised to prioritise such cases for consultation with the NEPS psychologist at the earliest stage.</p> <p>More information is available on: http://www.education.ie/home.</p>

Department of Education and Skills – its Services and Agencies	
National Council for Special Education (NCSE)	<p>Some of the key tasks of the NCSE relating to students with special educational needs include to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide information to parents, schools and other stakeholders about good practice concerning the education of students with special educational needs; • plan and co-ordinate the provision of education and support services; • consult with the HSE to plan and co-ordinate education and health services for students with special educational needs; • allocate resources to schools to support individual students with special educational needs; • make recommendations to the DES in respect of applications for assistive technology, school transport and Home Tuition; • coordinate, develop, and deliver a range of professional development initiatives and support structure for teachers working with students with special educational needs in mainstream and special settings. • provide guidance, support and specialist training for Deaf/Hard of Hearing students and those who are Blind/Visually Impaired and to their parents. • carry out research; • advise the Minister for Education and Skills about matters relating to the education of students with disabilities. <p>More information is available on: http://www.ncse.ie/.</p> <p>Visiting Teachers (VTs) and Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs) link directly with parents to support their child with special education needs.</p>
Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs)	<p>Each SENO has responsibility for a list of schools, (primary, post-primary and special), within the particular area they serve. At present, SENOs are mainly involved in resourcing schools to meet the needs of children with special educational needs and in ensuring that these resources are used efficiently in schools, in accordance with DES policy.</p> <p>SENOs keep parents of children with special educational needs informed of the resourcing decisions being made on their children’s behalf. SENOs therefore have a role in supporting and advising parents of children with special educational needs.</p> <p>SENOs identify possible placements for children with special educational needs, liaise with the HSE and other services, engage in discussions with schools and assist in planning the transition of children between schools and onwards from schools to further/higher education and other services.</p> <p>Contacting your SENO</p> <p>You can contact the SENO dealing with your area by email or phone. Where a SENO is not in his/her office, a voice mail service is provided where you may leave a message with your contact details. Contact details for Special Educational Needs Organisers are available on the NCSE website (www.ncse.ie) or through your local primary or post-primary school.</p>

Department of Education and Skills – its Services and Agencies

<p>Visiting Teachers</p>	<p>Visiting teachers are qualified teachers with particular skills and knowledge of the development and education of children with varying degrees of hearing loss and/or visual impairment. They offer longitudinal support to children, their families and schools from the time of referral through to the end of post-primary education.</p> <p>Each visiting teacher (VT) is responsible for a particular region and is allocated a caseload of students. The VT supports children/young people, parents, guardians, teachers and other professionals involved with the child. The frequency and nature of support takes into account a range of factors based on the individual's needs. The work of the VT involves liaising with other professionals and agencies such as audiological scientists, ophthalmology services, speech and language therapists, low vision specialists, psychologists, early intervention teams, school staffs, and with parents.</p> <p>More information at http://ncse.ie/visiting-teachers</p> <p>Referrals may be made in writing to visiting teachers by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents • Schools • HSE Audiological and Ophthalmology Services • Eye Clinics • National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI) • Cochlear Implant Unit, Beaumont Hospital • Chime <p>Each referral should be made on the standard referral form, and must be accompanied by an up-to-date audiology or ophthalmology report, as appropriate</p> <p>Referrals should be sent directly to the local visiting teacher at http://ncse.ie/vt_contact_details</p>
<p>National Council for Curriculum and Assessment</p>	<p>The NCCA advises the Minister for Education and Skills on curriculum and assessment for early childhood education and for primary and post-primary schools. The NCCA has published influential guidelines on teaching students with special educational needs and is a good source of information on the requirements of your child's syllabus or course of study. More information is available on: http://www.ncca.ie/.</p>

Department of Health – Agencies	
Health Service Executive (HSE)	<p>For children with special educational needs, the HSE provides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Therapeutic supports (clinical psychology, psychiatry, speech and language therapy, physiotherapy and occupational therapy) • Assessments of Need (AON) for children with disabilities born after June 1st, 2002 which can be accessed through local health offices • Early intervention services for children with special educational needs. <p>New developments underway in the health sector include the establishment of children’s disability network teams to provide assessment and intervention for students whether they are being educated in a mainstream or special setting. In the future these teams will be able to provide a profile of the strengths and needs of each child who avail of services.</p> <p>Health professionals should advise parents of the health services that are available in their region and the way in which their child can access these services.</p> <p>However it may be a few years before the changes are fully in place. While awaiting the full roll-out of the HSE teams, schools should not refuse enrolment of a child on the basis that the child cannot access health supports.</p>
Tusla	<p>Tusla is the national agency responsible for ensuring that every child either attends a school or otherwise receives an education. More information is available on: http://www.tusla.ie/.</p> <p>Education Welfare Officers (EWOs)</p> <p>Education welfare officers are employed by Tusla. Their job is to support families and to make sure that every child receives an education, as required in law. They are also responsible for making sure that a child who is not attending school receives a minimum education.</p> <p>Any parent who is having problems ensuring their child attends school regularly, or who encounters a serious delay in finding a school placement, may request the advice and assistance of an education welfare officer (EWO). They work in the best interests of the children and young people who do not attend school regularly.</p> <p>EWOs work collaboratively with schools and other agencies, including the NCSE.</p>

14. Where Can Parents Find More Information About Their Child's Special Educational Needs?

There are many organisations set up to support parents and families of children with disabilities. Please see below for a list and website addresses of these organisations. Parents should be careful when using websites to make sure that the information being provided is accurate and up to date. Parents should always consult with the school, SENO and/or other professional when making important decisions about their child's education.

Please note that these organisations are listed only for information purposes. The National Council for Special Education may have had no involvement with these organisations and cannot vouch for them or their staff. Parents should always satisfy themselves regarding the appropriateness of providing any information concerning their child to any third-party.

Access

- **Accessibility:** <http://www.assistireland.ie/eng/Home/>; <http://www.accessireland.info/>
- **Enable Ireland:** <http://www.enableireland.ie/parents>
- **Institute for Design and Disability:** <http://www.idd.ie/>

Benefits and Allowances

- **Carer's Allowance:** <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Schemes/IllnessDisabilityAndCaring/Carers/CarersAllowance/Pages/ca.aspx>
- **Carers Benefit:** <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Schemes/IllnessDisabilityAndCaring/Carers/CarersBenefit/Pages/carb.aspx>

Where can parents find more information about their child's special educational needs?

- **Department of Health:** The Department of Health links to the Citizens Information website for the provision of information on Illness and disability: (<http://health.gov.ie/>)
<http://www.citizensinformation.ie/categories/health/health-services-for-people-with-disabilities/health-services-for-people-with-intellectual-physical-or-sensory-disabilities>
- **Disability Allowance:** <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Schemes/IllnessDisabilityAndCaring/PeoplewithDisabilities/DisabilityAllowance/Pages/da.aspx>
- **Illness Benefit** – (formerly Disability Benefit) <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Schemes/IllnessDisabilityAndCaring/Illness/IllnessBenefit/Pages/ib.aspx>
- **Disablement Benefit:** <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Schemes/IllnessDisabilityAndCaring/Illness/OccupationalInjuries/DisablementBenefit/Pages/disable.aspx>
- **Housing – Disabled person's Housing Grant:** http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/housing/housing_grants_and_schemes/housing_adaptation_grant_for_people_with_disability.html

Disability Organisations

General

- **Centres for Independent Living** – *Location map of Centres:*
<http://offalycil.ie/cil-movement/centres-for-independent-living-in-ireland-2>
- **Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI):** <http://www.disability-federation.ie/>
- *The website of the Disability Federation of Ireland includes a full list of all voluntary bodies associated with DFI and links to their websites:*
<http://www.disability-federation.ie/index.php?uniqueID=161>
- **Disability.ie** – *portal site for disability related information in Ireland:*
<http://www.disability.ie/>
- **National Learning Network:** <http://nln.ie/>
- **People with Disabilities in Ireland:** <http://www.pwdi.ie/>

Parent Organisations

- **National Parents Council (Primary):** www.npc.ie
- **National Parents Council (Post-Primary):** www.npcpp.ie
- **Special Needs Parents Association:** www.specialneedsparents.ie
- **Gaeloideachas:** www.gealscoileanna.ie

Sensory Disabilities

Blindness

- Féach: <http://www.feach.ie/>
- Fighting Blindness: <http://www.fightingblindness.ie/>
- Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind: <http://www.guidedogs.ie/>
- National Council for the Blind in Ireland: <http://www.ncbi.ie/>
- NCBI <http://www.ncbi.ie/>
- National Education Centre for Blind Children <https://childvision.ie/site/>

DEAF and Hard of Hearing

- Catholic Institute for Deaf people: <http://www.cidp.ie/>
- Chime: <https://www.chime.ie>
- Irish Deaf Society: <http://www.irishdeafsociety.ie/>
- Irish Hard of Hearing Association: <http://www.ihha.ie>
- The Irish Deaf – online directory: <http://www.irishdeaf.com>
- Our New Ears: <https://restoredhearing.com/2015/08/07/our-new-ears/>
- Sharing the Journey: www.sharingthejourney.ie/

Deafblind

- Anne Sullivan Foundation: www.annesullivan.ie

Physical Disabilities

- Migraine Ireland: <http://www.migraine.ie/>
- Neurological Alliance of Ireland: <http://www.nai.ie/>
- The Irish Epilepsy Association: <http://www.epilepsy.ie/>
- Brain research: <http://www.brainresearch.ie/>
- Central Remedial Clinic: <http://www.crc.ie>
- Enable Ireland: <http://www.enableireland.ie/>
- Irish Kidney Association: <http://www.ika.ie/>
- Irish Wheelchair Association: <http://www.iwa.ie/>

Where can parents find more information about their child's special educational needs?

- **Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Society Ireland:** <http://www.ms-society.ie/>
- **Muscular Dystrophy Ireland:** <http://www.mdi.ie/>
- **Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus Ireland:** <http://www.sbhi.ie>

Intellectual Disabilities

- **Acquired Brain Injury Ireland:** <http://www.abiireland.ie/>
- **Down Syndrome Ireland:** <http://www.downsyndrome.ie>
- **Inclusion Ireland:** <http://www.inclusionireland.ie/>
- **Headway Ireland:** *Support and services to people affected by brain injury* <http://www.headwayireland.ie/>
- **National Federation of Voluntary Bodies:** *Association of voluntary bodies providing services to persons with intellectual disability and their families:* <http://www.fedvol.ie/>
- **St. John of Gods Services** *for people with intellectual disabilities:* http://www.sjog.ie/services/services_intell_main.html
- **St. Michael's House** – *Specialised day and residential services for people with learning disabilities throughout Dublin city and county:* <http://www.smh.ie>
- **Sunbeam House Services** – *provides training, employment and care services for adults with a learning disability:* <http://www.sunbeam.ie>

Autism

- **ASIAM** <https://www.asiam.ie/>
- **ASPIRE: Asperger Syndrome Association of Ireland:** <http://www.aspireireland.ie/cmsWP/>
- **Autism Support Ireland:** <http://www.autismsupport.ie/>
- **Irish Autism Action:** <http://www.autismireland.ie/>
- **Irish Society for Autism:** <http://www.autism.ie/>
- **The Shine Centre:** <http://shineireland.com/>

Specific Learning Disability

- **Dyslexia Association:** <http://www.dyslexia.ie/>
- **Dyspraxia Association of Ireland:** <http://www.dyspraxia.ie/>

Specific Speech & Language Difficulty

- Irish Association of Speech & Language Therapists (IASLT): <http://www.iaslt.ie/>

Mental and Emotional Disabilities

- **Aware** – *Helping Defeat Depression*: <http://www.aware.ie>
- **Camphill** – *Camphill Communities of Ireland is part of an international charitable trust working with people with intellectual and other disabilities*: <http://www.camphill.ie/What-is-Camphill-p-6.html>
- **Headstrong/Jigsaw**: <https://www.jigsaw.ie/>
- **Mental Health Ireland**: <http://www.mentalhealthireland.ie/>

Equality and Human Rights

- **Equality Authority**: <http://www.equality.ie/>
- **Equal Status Act 2000**: <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2000/act/8/enacted/en/html>
- **Irish Council for Civil Liberties**: <http://www.iccl.ie/about-the-iccl-2.html>
- **The Equality Tribunal** – *first location for equality cases arising under both employment equality and equal status legislation*: <http://www.equalitytribunal.ie/index.asp>

Events

- **Special Olympics**: <http://www.specialolympics.ie/>
- **ABLE awards**: www.able.ie

Government

- **Irish Government** – *information on the Irish State*: <http://www.irlgov.ie/>
- **Department of Social Protection**: <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Pages/default.aspx>
- **Department of Health**: <http://health.gov.ie/>
- **Department of Justice, Equality and Defence**: <http://www.justice.ie>
- **Department of Education & Skills**: <http://www.education.ie/en/>

Where can parents find more information about their child's special educational needs?

- **National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS):** <http://www.education.ie/home/home.jsp?maincat=33437&pcategory=33437&ecategory=33437§ionpage=27692&language=EN&link=&page=1>
- **Visiting Teacher Service (for children who are blind/visually impaired or deaf/hard of hearing):** <http://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/Visiting-Teacher-Service/>

International Links

- **European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education**
- **European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD):** <http://www.easpd.eu/>
- **European Disability Forum:** <http://www.edf-feph.org>
- **Disability World – online magazine:** <https://www.disabled-world.com/>
- **Institute of Independent Living – serve self-help organisations of disabled people who work for equal opportunities, self-determination and self-respect:** <http://www.independentliving.org/>
- **Inclusion Europe – European Association of Societies for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities and their Families:** <http://www.inclusion-europe.org/>

Public Services

- **Contact information for public services in Ireland:** <http://www.citizensinformation.ie/categories>
- **Information Commissioner, the Office of:** www.irlgov.ie/oic
- **Ombudsman and Disability:** <http://www.ombudsman.gov.ie/en/DisabilityAct2005/>
- **Social Inclusion Division** of the Department of Social Protection – *working for the prevention and elimination of poverty and social exclusion:* <http://www.socialinclusion.ie/> and <http://www.combatpoverty.ie/index.html>

State Agencies

- **Health Service Executive:** http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/Find_a_Service/
- **National Council for Special Education:** <http://www.ncse.ie/>
- **National Disability Authority:** <http://www.nda.ie>
- **Tusla:** www.tusla.ie/

Support Services

- **Live Advisor:** http://www.citizensinformationboard.ie/services/accessibility_services/liveadvisor.html

Live advisor is an instant chat service operating between the hours of 9am-5pm (Monday-Friday), which is specifically targeted towards people with hearing and speech difficulties and others who have difficulty communicating by telephone.

- **Muiriosa:** <http://www.muiriosa.ie/>

Muiriosa Foundation provide a range of services and supports to persons with an intellectual disability (and their families) – residential services, respite, day services, education, and multidisciplinary supports – across six midland counties.

- **National Adult Literacy Agency:** <http://www.nala.ie/>
- **Rehab Care** – training, employment, social care and commercial services: <http://www.rehab.ie>
- **Samaritans:** <http://www.samaritans.org/>
- **Youthreach** – Early School leavers: <http://www.youthreach.ie>

Travel and Transport

- **Bus Eireann** – disabled access: <http://www.buseireann.ie/inner.php?id=120>
- **Disabled Drivers Association:** <http://www.ddai.ie/>
- **Dublin Airport** – Travellers with a disability: <https://www.dublinairport.com/at-the-airport/passenger-information/special-assistance>
- **Dublin Bus** – disabled access: <http://www.dublinbus.ie/en/Your-Journey1/Accessibility/>
- **Irish Rail** – disabled access: http://www.irishrail.ie/contact_us/contact_disabled_access.asp
- **Luas** – Light Rail Transit System, Dublin: <https://luas.ie/assets/files/ACCESSIBILITY%20GUIDE%20JAN%202010.pdf>

Appendix 1: Definitions of High and Low Incidence Special Educational Needs

What follows are definitions used by the DES for determining eligibility to certain DES funded schemes and grants, e.g. enhanced capitation for special schools and classes, special school transport, assistive technology, SNA scheme.

High Incidence Special Educational Needs

Borderline Mild General Learning Disability

This category includes children who have been assessed by a psychologist as having a borderline mild general learning disability. A psychologist may recommend such children for special class placement on account of a special learning problem such as:

- Mild emotional disturbance associated with persistent failure in the ordinary class
- Immature social behaviour
- Poor level of language development in relation to overall intellectual level.

(DES Circular Special Education 08/02).

Mild General Learning Disability

This category includes students who have been assessed by a psychologist as having a mild general learning disability (DES Circular Special Education 08/02).

Specific Learning Disability

This category includes children who have been assessed by a psychologist as:

- Being of average intellectual ability or higher **and**
- Having a degree of learning disability specific to basic skills in reading, writing or mathematics which places them at or below the 2nd percentile⁴ on suitable, standardised, norm-referenced tests.*

⁴ Percentiles represent a way of measuring a child's performance in a standardised test and comparing it to all others of the same age or stage of education who have taken the test at the same time. If a child is at the second percentile, it means that 98 per cent of the results of children of that age or at the same stage of education were higher. If a child is at the twenty fifth percentile, it means that 75% of the results were higher than the child's and so on.

Low Incidence Special Educational Needs

Physical Disability

Students have permanent or protracted disabilities arising from such conditions as congenital deformities,

- spina bifida
- dyspraxia
- muscular dystrophy
- cerebral palsy
- brittle bones or
- severe accidental injury.

Because of the impairment of their physical function they require special additional intervention and support if they are to have available to them a level and quality of education appropriate to their needs and abilities.

Many require the use of a wheelchair, mobility or seating aid, or other technological support.

They may suffer from a lack of muscular control and co-ordination and may have difficulties in communication, particularly in oral articulation, as for example severe dyspraxia.

Students with a physical disability who have learning difficulties arising from the disability *may* need support from the special education teacher where there are consequent significant learning difficulties. Others may need assistive technology only (DES Circular Special Education 02/05).

Deaf/Hard of Hearing

This includes students who have a hearing loss that is so serious as to impair significantly their capacity to hear and understand human speech. This prevents the child from participating fully in classroom interaction and from benefiting adequately from school instruction. The great majority of these children are hearing aid or cochlear implant users.

Note: The degree of hearing loss is most usually expressed by reference to the individual's thresholds of detection (hearing thresholds) across different frequencies as evidenced by the pure tone audiogram. These may be averaged to give a single number which is associated with one of four descriptors: mild, moderate, severe and profound as set out in the table below.

Levels of hearing loss are illustrated in the following table:

Table 1: Descriptors for extent of Hearing Loss

Description of Hearing Loss	dB HL in better ear averaged over range of frequencies (0.5, 1, 2 and 4 kHz)
Mild	≤ 40 dB HL
Moderate	41 to 70 dB HL
Severe	71 to 95 dB HL
Profound	>95 dB HL

Blind/Visual Impairment

Students have a visual disability which is so serious as to impair significantly their capacity to see, thus interfering with their capacity to perceive visually presented materials, such as pictures, diagrams, and the written word. Some will have been diagnosed with conditions, such as congenital blindness, cataracts, albinism and retinitis pigmentosa. Most require the use of low-vision aids and are availing of the services of a Visiting Teacher **(This category is not intended to include those students whose visual difficulties are satisfactorily corrected by the wearing of spectacles and/or contact lenses)** (DES Circular Special Education 02/05).

Emotional Disturbance and/or Behaviour Problems (EBD)

Students are being treated by a psychiatrist or psychologist for such conditions as neurosis, childhood psychosis, hyperactivity, attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and conduct disorders that significantly impairing their socialisation and/or learning in school. **(This category is not intended to include students whose conduct or behavioural difficulties can be dealt with in accordance with agreed procedures on discipline).**

Some students in this category may need special education teacher support. Care support from special needs assistants will be provided for behaviour related care needs where:

- there is a clear diagnosis of EBD or Severe EBD **or**
 - a student has a behavioural disorder in conjunction with another disability
- and**
- It is clear that the school's strategies for managing behaviour have not been successful to date and it has been demonstrated how access to SNA support can assist the student.
 - The nature of the behaviour related care needs have been outlined in professional reports as being so significant that a student will require additional adult assistance in order to be able to attend school and to participate in education.

The circumstances in which SNA support will be provided for behaviour related care needs is set out in the DES Circular 0030/2014.

In certain circumstances, some students may require both supports (DES Circular Special Education 02/05).

Severe Emotional Disturbance and/or Behaviour Problems (Severe EBD)

A child with severe EBD must be in the care of a Psychiatrist or Clinical Psychologist for a severe clinical disorder. A very small number of students would be expected to fall within this category.

Moderate General Learning Disability

This category includes students who have been assessed by a psychologist as having a moderate general learning disability (DES Circular Special Education 02/05).

Severe and Profound General Learning Disability

This category includes students who have been assessed by a psychologist as having a severe or profound general learning disability. In addition, such students may have physical disabilities (DES Circular Special Education 02/05).

Autism Spectrum Disorder

This DES category includes students who have been assessed and classified by a psychiatrist or psychologist as having autism or autistic spectrum disorder according to DSM-5 or ICD-10 criteria.

In the interest of the student with an ASD and in order that the needs of the student are adequately addressed, it is important, where feasible, that for a definitive assessment of ASD, a multi-disciplinary assessment team should be involved. The need for a multi-disciplinary assessment is also in keeping with NEPS policy (DES Circular Special Education 02/05).

Students with Special Educational Needs Arising from an Assessed Syndrome

Examples of assessed syndromes include, for example, Down syndrome, William's syndrome and Tourette's syndrome.

Specific Speech and Language Disorder (SSLD)

This category includes:

- students assessed by a psychologist on a standardised test of intelligence that places nonverbal or performance ability within the average range or above
- students assessed by a speech therapist on a standardised test of language development that places performances in one or more of the main areas of speech and language development at two standard deviations or more below the mean, or at a generally equivalent level
- students whose difficulties are not attributable to hearing impairment; where the student is affected to some degree by hearing impairment, the hearing threshold for the speech-related frequencies should be 40Db
- students whose emotional and behavioural disorders or a physical disability are not considered to be primary causes of the difficulty experienced.

Multiple Disabilities

Students assessed with multiple disabilities meet the criteria for two or more of the low incidence disabilities described above (DES Circular Special Education 02/05).

Appendix 2: The Broader Legislative Framework

There have been many changes in the way special education is delivered in Ireland in recent decades. Some of the main changes have come about because a legislative framework has been put in place to address the needs of children with special educational needs. There are five key pieces of legislation which parents should be aware of. These are:

- The Education Act 1998
- The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004
- The Disability Act 2005
- The Education (Welfare) Act 2000.
- Education (Admissions to Schools) Act 2018

There are a number of other pieces of legislation which are also relevant to children and parents with special educational needs. These include Ireland's Data Protection Acts, Equality Acts [Employment Equality Act 1998 (www.equality.ie); the Equal Status Acts 2000-2004 (www.justice.ie); the Equality Act 2004 (www.equality.ie) and the Freedom of Information Act, 1998.

Some key features of this broad legal framework and how it might be relevant to you are outlined below. The full text of all of these Acts can be viewed at: <http://www.oireachtas.ie/>.

The Education Act 1998

This was the first law enacted in Ireland to deal with education. While this Act deals with education matters generally, it states that education for all children should take place in as 'inclusive' an environment as possible and that children with special educational needs have the same right to avail of, and benefit from appropriate education as other children.

The Education Act requires that schools use their available resources to ensure that the educational needs of all students, including those with disabilities and special educational needs are identified and provided for. It also gives the Minister for Education and Skills the function:

'to ensure that there is made available to each person resident in the State, including a person with a disability or who has other special educational needs, support services and a level of quality of education appropriate to meeting the needs and abilities of that person (Section 7 (1) (a)).

The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) act 2004

Under this Act a child with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs.

If the nature or degree of the child's needs, as assessed by a professional, is such that a mainstream placement is not seen as in the best interest of the child or in the interests of the effective education for the other children in the class then alternative provision will be provided in a special class in a mainstream school or in a special school.

The Disability Act 2005

The **Disability Act** is designed to promote the participation of people with disabilities in society by supporting the provision of disability specific services and improving access to mainstream public services. The Act establishes a right to an independent assessment of individual needs and a related service statement.

On 1st June 2007, Part 2 of the Disability Act became law for children under the age of five years, giving them a right to an independent assessment of need. Assessment Officers (HSE) and SENOs (NCSE) work together at a local level in relation to these assessments of need which take place under Section 8(3) of the Disability Act for children under the age of five years.

The Education (Welfare) Act 2000

Under this Act parents are responsible for making sure their child receives an education. The law also says that every child between the ages of 6 and 16 years must attend school or otherwise receive an education.

Most students attend recognised schools, although some are educated at home or in non-recognised schools.

The Education Welfare Board (now named as TUSLA) through its network of Education Welfare Officers with a responsibility for specific schools, implement the Act.

The Board acts as advocate or support for the child, parent or guardian if there is a difficulty with school attendance or educational welfare.

Education (admissions to schools) Act 2018

Under this act it is stated that a school is not allowed to discriminate in its admission of a student on the grounds of a student's disability or special educational needs.

Schools are required to prepare and publish an admissions policy which includes a statement that the school does not discriminate in its admission of a student on specified grounds.

Data Protection

The Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016/679 are designed to protect the rights of individuals with regard to personal data that is held about them by public bodies. The NCSE has a statutory responsibility to collect the personal data of students with special educational needs for whom additional supports are provided in schools and it has put arrangements in place to ensure compliance with the legislation and regulation. Full details of the NCSE's data protection policy setting out how personal data is used as well as information regarding rights as a data subject are available at <http://ncse.ie/ncse-data-protection>.

Freedom of Information Act 2014

The NCSE is a public body covered by the Freedom of Information Act 2014, which confers rights of access to records held by public bodies. Information on how to make an FOI request to the NCSE is available at www.ncse.ie/FOI. Further information about the Freedom of Information Act is available at <http://foi.gov.ie/>.

Appendix 3: Responsibilities of Schools and Agencies

This appendix sets out some key responsibilities of schools and State agencies in relation to the education of students with special educational needs.

Responsibilities of Schools

Each school has clear responsibilities – many of which are set out in legislation – aimed at ensuring that children with special educational needs have access to an appropriate education.

- Section 9 (b) of the Education Act states that each State-recognised school is required to ensure that the educational needs of all students, including those with a disability or other special educational needs, are identified and provided for (Government of Ireland, 1998).
- Each school should have in place a clear school-based staged process of assessment, intervention and review, which informs decisions regarding the placement of students with special educational needs. This involves appropriate data being gathered across various areas of development (including academic, social, emotional and life skills) that is used to modify programmes and instructional practices (DES, 2005).
- Mainstream schools that have students who access additional teaching or care supports or who are placed in special classes, and special schools should ensure that each student's support plan sets out:
 - specific learning targets and timelines
 - additional teaching and care supports to be provided and
 - expected outcomes
 - Education plans for students in special classes should identify the expected opportunities for students to be included in mainstream classes and the potential opportunities for reverse inclusion
- Section 7 of the Equal Status Act (Government of Ireland, 2000a) confirms that each State recognised school must ensure that its policies do not discriminate in relation to:
 - The admission or the terms of conditions of admission of a person as a student to the school
 - The access of a student to any course, facility or benefit provided by the school
 - Any other term or condition or participation in the school by a student
 - The expulsion of a student from the school or any other sanction against the student

unless that compliance with any of the above provisions in relation to a student with a disability would, by virtue of the disability, make impossible, or have a seriously detrimental effect on, the provision by an educational establishment of its services to other students.

- Under Section 21 of the Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998), school plans are required to state the objectives of the school and the measures which the school proposes to take to achieve those objectives, including equality of access to, and participation in the school, by students with disabilities or who have other special educational needs.
- Education (Admissions to Schools) Act 2018 requires that schools prepare and publish an admissions policy which states that the school shall not discriminate in its admission of students to the school on specified grounds including students with disabilities or other special educational need.

It follows therefore, that school enrolment policies and practices should have no overt or covert barriers in place which deter students with special educational needs from applying to enrol in a school. Examples of such barriers are where schools may advise a parent that:

- another mainstream or similar school is better resourced or would be able to better support their child
 - the enrolment of a student with special educational needs is conditional on the provision of additional educational resources
 - health supports must be in place before their child can be enrolled or
 - available places in a special class must be kept for prospective students from a feeder school, thereby limiting the category of students with special educational needs who can enrol in the class.
- Section 23 (2)(e) of the Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998), requires the Principal to encourage the involvement of parents in the education of students and in the achievements of the objectives of the school.

Responsibilities of the Department of Education and Skills

The Department of Education and Skills (DES)

The role of the DES is to enable learners to achieve their full potential and contribute to Ireland's economic, social and cultural development. A key Departmental goal, is to have an education and training system that welcomes and meaningfully includes learners with disabilities and special educational needs, learners from disadvantaged communities/backgrounds, and those with language, cultural and social differences.

The DES articulates government policy on education, funds schools, pays teachers and other school staff, provides direct support and advice to schools, continuing professional development for teachers and funds school transport services. Through its Inspectorate, the DES provides an external evaluation of schools.

The DES provides a psychological support service for schools and students through its National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS). The NEPS service to schools provides a balance between casework, support and development work. Casework focuses on the needs of individual students and is carried out through the process set out in the NEPS "Continuum of Support" guidelines. NEPS uses a problem solving approach to assessment and intervention when working with those involved with the student's education and development. Cases are prioritised following a planning meeting(s) in the school. Support and development work involves work of a more preventative nature, where the psychologist may be involved in projects, the provision of advice and support to teachers or groups of teachers, or to the whole school on relevant school policies and procedures.

The DES also funds the appellant process under Section 29 of the Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998). Section 29 of the Education Act, gives parents the right to appeal certain decisions made by a school's board of management, or a person acting on behalf of the board of management, to the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Skills.

An appeal may be made to the Secretary General of the Department of Education & Skills in respect of a decision by a board of management or a person acting on behalf of a board of management to:

- permanently exclude a student from the school or
- suspend a student from the school for a cumulative period of 20 school days in any one school year or
- refuse to enrol a student in the school.

Responsibilities of State Agencies

A number of State agencies support the education of students with special educational needs and may have a role in providing guidance on placement options.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE)

The NCSE is an independent agency funded by the State. The NCSE promotes a continuum of educational provision, which is inclusive and responsive, and which provides an appropriate education for children and adults with special educational needs. The NCSE provides additional teaching and other supports to schools; advises educators and parents; co-ordinates, develops and delivers a range of professional development and support structures for teachers; provides guidance, support and specialist teaching for Deaf/Hard of Hearing students and those who are Blind/Visually Impaired and to their parents; undertakes and disseminates research into special education; and provides policy advice to the Minister for Education and Skills on special education issues.

In planning and co-ordinating the provision of placement options, the NCSE is mindful of the national policy of an inclusive approach to education – unless otherwise contra-indicated.

Tusla

Tusla is an independent statutory agency, established under the Education (Welfare) Act, (Government of Ireland, 2000b) with responsibility for ensuring that every child in the State, either attends school, or otherwise receives an education. In particular, the Board has a key role in responding to instances where children are not attending school regularly, or where there is concern about the child's educational welfare. Section 14 (1) of the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000, obliges Tusla to establish and maintain a register of all children in receipt of an education in a place other than a recognised school.

Parents are able to appeal a decision, under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998, by a school to permanently exclude a student from the school, or suspend a student from the school for a cumulative period of 20 school days in any one school year, or refuse to enroll a student in the school. Where such an appeal fails or no appeal has been brought, Tusla will make all reasonable efforts to have the child enrolled in another recognised school. If this is not possible, Tusla will – with the consent of the child's parents and the Minister for Education and Skills – make such other arrangements, as it considers appropriate, to ensure that the child receives a certain minimum education and shall monitor the progress of the child's education.

A parent who is experiencing problems in ensuring that his/her child attends school regularly may request the advice and assistance of Tusla. Education Welfare Officers employed by Tusla work in the interests of the children and young people who do not attend school regularly and work collaboratively with schools and other agencies in meeting the needs of the children and the young people concerned.

The Health Service Executive (HSE)

The HSE delivers thousands of different health and social services in hospitals and communities across the country.

The HSE provides a range of services for people with intellectual, physical and sensory disabilities or autism. These services include basic health services as well as assessment, rehabilitation, community care and residential care.

Some services are provided directly by the HSE. Many of the community, residential and rehabilitative training services are provided by voluntary organisations with grant aid from the HSE.

The HSE and its associated funded service providers employ Health Professionals who play a key role in supporting children with special educational needs. These include medical doctors and consultants, psychologists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, physiotherapists, psychiatrists and many others.

The Disability Act (Government of Ireland, 2005) provides for, among other things, the assessment of need of people with disabilities and the consequent drawing up of service statements. At present children who were born after 1 June 2002 are eligible to apply for an assessment under the Disability Act (regardless of their age at the time of application). The assessment of need is carried out or arranged by assessment officers who are independent officers of the HSE. After the assessment, a service statement is drawn up by a liaison officer who is also an independent HSE official.

When the assessment is complete, the assessment officer writes an assessment report.

The assessment report sets out:

- A statement of the nature and extent of the disability, if any
- A statement of the health and education needs arising from the disability
- A statement of the appropriate services to meet those needs
- A statement of the period within which a review of the assessment should be carried out (this must be no later than a year from the date the assessment report is issued).

The HSE is currently rolling out a new national programme to improve disability services for children and young people aged 0-18⁵. This programme aims to have one clear pathway to services for all children with disabilities living in an area so that no family is left without a service. The programme involves health and education personnel working together to support children with disabilities so that all available resources are used to the greatest benefit for children and families.

⁵ The programme 'Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People' aims to achieve a national unified approach to delivering disability health services, so that there is a clear pathway to the services they need for all children regardless of where they live, what school they go to or the nature of their disability or delay.

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