



Circular letter SP ED 24/03

Circular to Boards of Management and Principal Teachers of National Schools

Allocation of Resources for Pupils with Special Educational Needs in National Schools

1. Background

The Department of Education and Science wishes to inform schools of the arrangements being made for processing of applications for teaching and special needs assistant resources for pupils with special educational needs for the school year 2003/2004.

As schools are aware an automatic response to support pupils with special educational needs (SEN) was committed to in 1998. This was implemented by a system of resource allocation introduced in 1999 and revised in 2002. Since 1998, very significant levels of resources have been allocated to schools. However, reviews of applications and allocations by National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and the Inspectorate in 2002 and 2003 showed that there has been misapplication of the terms of the circulars.

At the same time, schools, teachers and their representatives have highlighted that, through experience of deploying the increased resources, they have identified improvements that might be made to best use the resources in the interests of pupils. The Department's own reviews of the use of these resources concur with some of the suggestions made and this circular provides clarification in relation to the deployment of resources in schools.

2. Processing of Applications for 2003/2004 school year

All applications for resource teacher and special needs assistant resources received after 14 February 2003 and by close of business on 31 August 2003 will be examined on the basis of the supporting professional report(s) and in the context of the resources already available to the school.

Applications for resources in respect of new entrants have been given priority and, following a review of the supporting documentation submitted, the applicant schools have, where appropriate, been given allocations. These allocations have been given initially on a temporary basis pending subsequent examination in the context of the level of resources already made available to the schools.

The remaining applications (i.e. relating to other than new entrants) will be processed in the context of the level of special needs resources already allocated to the schools. To facilitate this exercise each school should, if they have not already done so, forward the supporting professional reports to **the Special Education Section, Department of Education and**

Science, Cornamaddy, Athlone. The envelope should be marked “SER Team” – with the school roll number and county also listed. The parental consent form attached as [Appendix 4](#) may be used, where appropriate, and retained in the school.

The Department will make every effort to expedite the processing of the applications with a view to issuing a response as early as possible in the school year 2003/2004. A dedicated team of psychologists and inspectors has been established for that purpose. Schools are requested to provide any additional information sought by the team in the course of its work.

Schools are asked to bear in mind that, because of the large number of applications and the need to review resources already available in schools, processing the applications will be a complex time-consuming operation. The co-operation of schools in returning required documentation will assist in this process.

3. Census of Pupils and Resources

So that applications can be considered in the context of the overall level of resources available to the school, and the other pupils with special needs being catered for in schools, the Department will be conducting a census of special needs pupils and of allocated resources in September. While the demands on schools at the start of the school year are appreciated, it is necessary to receive the response to the census before applications can be processed. All schools and not just those with current applications should reply to the census.

4. Temporary concessions pending determination of applications

Some schools may find that, due to pupils with SEN having left or leaving the school, either teaching or special needs assistant (SNA) resources should already have been or now fall to be suppressed. Where such schools have submitted an application for additional resources in the period 15 February- 31 August 2003, they may retain the surplus resources up to the level of resources applied for in the above period. Retention of these resources shall be on a temporary basis pending the outcome of the review of the application.

5. Applications received after 31 August 2003

The arrangements for processing applications received after the 31st August will be considered in the context of the outcome of the discussions on a weighted system of allocation of resource teaching and the parallel discussions on the allocation and deployment of SNAs referred to in paragraph 10 below. A further communication will be sent to schools in this regard.

6. SEN Planning and Management at School Level

In the light of the views expressed by schools and teachers and their representatives, and taking account of its own reviews, the Department wishes to facilitate the most effective deployment of resources allocated for special educational needs. The current process has enabled the allocation of significant resources within the education system. However the Department is aware that some schools feel restricted as to how they might deploy special needs resources and it wishes to clarify the flexibility that schools might employ in this regard.

Although children with SEN may learn at a different pace and in a different way from other children, they need to belong to a peer group and to mix with children of different abilities in a variety of situations. Research on mixed ability teaching illustrates that children of lower ability benefit greatly and children of average or above ability are not academically disadvantaged. However, the practice has developed in recent years of using resource hours for individual

tuition only. An exclusive reliance on this approach is contrary to the principle of integration in teaching and learning. Wherever possible, schools should provide additional help for children in the mainstream classroom or, if necessary, in small groups. This will also have the effect of minimising the disruption to the normal class programme that can happen if individual children are being withdrawn at different times for tuition.

Various categories of special education teachers are deployed in the education system e.g. visiting teachers, learning support teachers, resource teachers, resource teachers for travellers. The Department will support school management in the development of coherent special education support teams that draw on the skills of all the specialist teachers listed above, without making artificial distinctions between them. Although resource teaching allocations have been sanctioned on the basis of individual applications, the overriding principle is that the resources be deployed in the manner that best meets the needs of the pupils with special needs in the school.

As provided for in the Department's circulars, Special Needs Assistants should be considered appropriate where a pupil has **significant** medical need, a **significant** impairment of physical or sensory function or where their behaviour is a danger to themselves or to other pupils. In many cases the SNA will be providing care to help with toileting and feeding. It would be expected that very often this level of care should diminish as the child matures. Schools should review their SNA allocations in advance of making additional applications for SNAs to see whether the special need identified can be met by redeployment of existing SNA resources.

As with special needs teaching resources principals may, where appropriate, deploy individual SNA resources to support several pupils with special needs. In appropriate circumstances this may involve the deployment of an individual SNA in more than one classroom. Schools are reminded that SNAs should only be allocated duties of a non-teaching nature.

7. The staged approach to assessment, intervention and review

A staged approach to assessment, identification and programme implementation is appropriate generally in the area of special needs. [Appendix 1](#) gives further details of the staged approach. There will of course be cases where there is an obvious immediate need for assessment and allocation of resources.

8. Children with Borderline Mild General Learning Disability

Children with a Borderline Mild GLD have a full scale IQ in the range 70 –79. The criteria in Circular 08/02, relating to such children require account to be taken of the extent to which the child is making progress in his/her present learning environment and the other existing support available to the child in his/her school. This is effectively a staged intervention approach. It is expected that such pupils should in the main be catered for by the mainstream class teacher and the learning support teacher. The allocation of any additional resources will only be considered in exceptional circumstances following the staged approach outlined in this circular.

This approach is in line with principles of inclusion, as espoused in recently-published curricula for general learning disability and in the Learning Support Guidelines. The revised primary curriculum also facilitates such an approach. Evidence of a staged approach must accompany all applications for additional resources for children with Borderline Mild General Learning Disability before consideration will be given to the allocation of additional resources. For such pupils, schools should submit the Individual Profile and Learning Programme (Appendix B of the Learning Support Guidelines), together with a statement of the current Learning Support caseload in the school ([Appendix 2](#)), when they are submitting the professional reports relating to these children.

9. Children with Specific Learning Disability (Dyslexia)

The Department wishes to draw attention to the recommendation of the Task Force on Dyslexia that a staged approach should be used in the case of pupils with dyslexia. The expertise within the learning support service is particularly appropriate to the needs of pupils with dyslexia. The Department will take account of the outcome of the review of applications by the dedicated team of inspectors and psychologists in giving further consideration to the Task Force's recommendation.

10. Weighted System of Allocation for Resource Teachers and Allocation Process for Special Needs Assistants

The Department will be engaging in discussions with the education partners with a view to developing a weighted system of allocations for special needs teaching resources with effect from the 2004/2005 school year. This would involve an annual allocation being made to schools based on predicted incidence of special educational needs within different size school populations. Such a system would obviate the need for individual applications for resources in respect of individual pupils other than in the most exceptional circumstances. In developing a weighted system regard will also be had to the level of learning support teachers' caseloads.

The Department will also be engaging in discussions in relation to the allocation and deployment of Special Needs Assistants with a view to ensuring appropriate allocation and effective deployment.

11. Co-operation of schools

The Department wishes to acknowledge the co-operation of schools to date in the implementation of the revised arrangements for processing SEN applications. Your continued co-operation is requested in the following areas in particular:

- schools should ensure that original SER forms are fully completed and signed
- schools should ensure that the appropriate professional documentation is provided – please consult table at [Appendix 3](#)
- schools should adhere strictly to the Department's circulars and guidelines
- it would assist the process if schools kept follow-up written and telephone enquiries in relation to their applications to a minimum. The Department's Special Education Section and NEPS are anxious to direct as many as possible of the staff resources available to processing applications.

Schools' attention is drawn to the following:

- schools should review existing SEN resources within the school and the progress being made by pupils for whom those resources were allocated on an ongoing basis. Special Education Section should be notified in circumstances where pupils' progress is such as to warrant a reduction (the notification to specify the level of reduction) or full withdrawal of the resources sanctioned. Schools should advise the Department of instances where a pupil in receipt of SEN resources has left the school.
- following the Department's examination of each application and in advance of sanctioning further SEN resources, schools will in future be requested to certify that resources cannot be redeployed so as to accommodate the pupil who is the subject of the SEN application in question

- schools will also be asked to certify that they have not retained SEN resources for pupils who have since left the school
- all SEN appointments will be liable to audit.

12. National Council for Special Education

Schools may wish to note that a National Council for Special Education is being established. The Council will provide a range of services at local and national level in order that the educational needs of children with disabilities are provided for. In this regard, the Council will co-ordinate with schools, Health Boards and other relevant bodies the provision of education and related support services to children with disabilities.

The Council is being established initially by Order under the Education Act, 1998 to allow it come into being in 2003. It will be further provided for in the Education for Persons with Disabilities Bill which was published last July and which it is intended to enact in 2004. A further communication will be sent to schools in relation to the Council in due course.

13. Enquiries

Enquiries relating to this circular may be directed to:

Special Education Section Telephone No. 0902 74621 or 01 8896400

This Circular is also available on the Department of Education & Science website at www.education.ie

L. Hughes
Principal Officer
Special Education Section

September, 2003

Staged Approach to Special Educational Needs

Stage I

A class teacher or parent may have concerns about the academic, physical, social, behavioural or emotional development of certain pupils. The teacher should then administer screening measures, which may include screening checklists and profiles for children in senior infants and first class, standardised, norm-referenced tests for older children and behavioural checklists where appropriate.

The class teacher should then draw up a short, simple plan for extra help within the normal classroom setting in the relevant areas of learning and/or behavioural management. The success of the plan should be reviewed on a regular basis, with appropriate parental involvement. If concern remains after approximately two school terms, the Special Education Support Team in the school may be consulted about the desirability of a move to Stage II.

Supports available for Stage 1:

- Home/School/Community Liaison teachers, if available, should be involved at this stage and in subsequent stages in supporting and advising the parents of children with difficulties in school.
- Teachers in schools that have access to the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) may consult their area psychologist about their proposed learning or behavioural management plan.

Stage II

In the case of children with learning difficulties, if the class teacher's plan fails to achieve the desired outcome, then the child should be referred to the learning support teacher, with parental permission, for further diagnostic testing. If this diagnostic assessment indicates that supplementary teaching would be beneficial, then this should be arranged. Parents and class teacher should be involved with the learning support teacher in drawing up the learning plan, complementing the plan with supplementary activities in class and at home and in implementing the plan.

The learning support teacher and the class teacher should review on a regular basis, in consultation with the parents, the rate of progress of each child receiving supplementary teaching. If significant concerns remain after a period of at least one school term, then it may be necessary to implement Stage III.

In the case of children with emotional or behavioural difficulties, it is recognised that, with serious difficulties, more urgent action may be needed. In these cases, the child's needs should, with parental permission, be discussed with the relevant NEPS psychologist or referred to the clinical services of the Health Board. This may lead to a more detailed plan of behavioural management to be implemented at home and in class and/or may lead to referral for further specialist assessment (Stage III).

Supports available for Stage II:

The learning support service has been established in order to meet the needs of the children with learning difficulties in the area of English and mathematics. In general, the service is provided for those children from first class up, who score at or below the 12th percentile on standardised, norm referenced tests. Children who score at or below the 2nd percentile should be accorded a high priority for learning support and review.

Other support staff and services available to schools may assist with programme planning at this stage.

Schools may also consult the area psychologist of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), where available, about diagnostic test results and about their proposed learning or behavioural management plans.

Stage III

The school formally requests a consultation, and, where appropriate, an assessment of need from a specialist from outside the school in respect of children with learning difficulties and mild/moderate behavioural problems who have failed to make progress after supplementary teaching or behavioural programme and of children with serious emotional disturbance and/or behavioural problems. Such specialist advice may be sought from psychologists, paediatricians, speech and language therapists, audiologists etc.

In consultation with the relevant specialist/s, the learning support teacher, resource teacher if available, and class teacher should then draw up a learning plan, which includes identification of any additional available resources that are considered necessary in order to implement the plan. The parents should be fully consulted throughout this process. This plan should be the subject of regular reviews, leading to revisions of the learning plan and referral for specialist review as necessary.

Supports available for Stage III:

A consultation may be requested from the National Educational Psychological Service or, where this is not yet available, schools may commission assessments from a private practitioner under the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments. Any private practitioner engaged by a school should have the relevant Department of Education and Science circulars and guidance notes drawn to their attention.

Details of Learning Support Caseload

Details of Learning Support Provision

*LS = Learning Support provision

School or Base School	School B	School C	School D	School E
Name and Roll Number	Name and Roll Number	Name and Roll Number	Name and Roll Number	Name and Roll Number

Please enter below the details of all pupils to whom learning support was given during the school year 2002/03. Please complete all columns and sign the declaration at the end of the form.

[illegible]

	Pupils' Initials	School (A,B,C, D,E)	Class Level (Jl, Sl, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)	Percentile ranking, standard score or screening test administered for literacy at (a) start of LS* and (b) currently		Percentile ranking, standard score or screening test administered for maths at (a) start of LS* and (b) currently		(a) Type of LS* – Individual (I), Group (G), In class (IC), and (b) hours per week		Duration of LS* in months
				(a)	(b)	(a)	(b)	(a)	(b)	
19										
20										
21										
22										
23										
24										
25										
26										
27										
28										
29										
30										

I confirm that the information given above is accurate in all respects:

Signed: _____ Principal Teacher

(in clusters of schools, all Principals must sign)

_____ Principal Teacher School B

_____ Principal Teacher School C

_____ Principal Teacher School D

_____ Principal Teacher School E

Signed: _____ Learning Support Teacher

Date: _____

Professional reports that are required in respect of each category of disability

- **Physical disability** – report from medical doctor or occupational therapist (psychological report may also be required)
- **Hearing impairment** – report from audiologist or verification of such reports from relevant visiting teacher (psychological report may also be required)
- **Visual impairment** – report from ophthalmic consultant or verification of such reports from relevant visiting teacher (psychological report may also be required)
- **Emotional disturbance/behavioural problems** – report from psychiatrist or clinical psychologist
- **Mild/moderate/severe/profound general learning disabilities** – psychological report
- **Borderline mild general learning disabilities** – see circular re staged process
- **Specific Learning Disability** – psychological report
- **Assessed syndromes** – psychological and/or other specialist report
- **Specific speech and language disorder** – psychological report **plus** speech and language therapist's report
- **Multiple disabilities** – the name of each disability must be specified on SER 1 and the appropriate reports submitted for each.

Parents'/Guardian's Consent Form

We consent to a review of the application for extra resources for our child to be carried out by a Psychologist from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS). We understand that the review will include an examination of professional reports on our child. (Note: all reports will be returned to the school after examination.)

We further understand that the outcome of this review will be made known to Special Education Section in the Department of Education and Science, who will notify the school Principal accordingly.

Please complete details and sign below.

Name of Child: _____

Date of Birth: _____

School: _____

Signed by (If child lives with both parents, then both parents should sign).

Mother: _____

Father: _____

Legal Guardian: _____

Contact phone number: _____

Date: _____