

SCHEME FOR THE COMMISSIONING OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENTS (SCPA)

Guidelines for Schools – 2023-2024

Purpose of the Scheme

The Scheme for the Commissioning of Psychological Assessments (SCPA) is provided by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)/Department of Education and Skills (DE) to assist in the delivery of a psychological service to all schools. The Scheme provides funding to schools to commission individual psychological assessments of students from psychologists who work in a private capacity.

The scheme is not a substitute for a full educational psychological service of the sort provided by NEPS/DE. It is an interim measure intended to supplement the NEPS service and meet current urgent needs for psychological assessment of children and young people. The operation of the scheme is reviewed on an ongoing basis by NEPS/DE.

Terms and Conditions

The 2023-2024 SCPA scheme operates between 1st September 2023 and the 30th June 2024.

Schools are responsible for commissioning psychologists to carry out assessments under the scheme. Schools may only commission psychologists who are on the *current* SCPA panel.

In general, the commissioning of psychological assessments, by schools, under SCPA, will be agreed and arranged in collaboration with the NEPS psychologist providing a service to the school. In some instances, schools that temporarily lose the service of a NEPS psychologist may be permitted to commission some assessments during the psychologist's absence, on receipt of written approval from the local NEPS Regional Director.

An individual psychological assessment, in its entirety, must be wholly and exclusively carried out by a psychologist whose name appears on the current SCPA panel.

SCPA sanctions are valid only for the year in which they are issued i.e. between September and June and may not be carried over into a new year.

It is expected that all psychologists on the panel will complete no more than 180 assessments in a school year, and that they will complete not less than 3 assessments each year. If a psychologist completes less than three assessments in a year, and if NEPS becomes aware that the psychologist was unavailable to carry out assessments, then the psychologist may not be asked to renew their membership of the panel in the following year.

Payment for assessments carried out under the scheme must be made from SCPA funds and from such funds alone. Psychologists who accept commissions under the scheme may not seek or accept payment from any other source in respect of such commissions and will be required to certify that they have not done so as a condition of receiving payment. Seeking or accepting payment from any other source in respect of an assessment under the scheme will constitute grounds for removal from the SCPA panel.

The personal data of the individual student gathered for the purpose of a SCPA assessment may not be used for any purpose other than the conduct of that assessment.

Schools and psychologists are required to adhere to the recommended procedures, as laid down by the NEPS/DE.

SCPA psychologists must work within their areas of competence, keep abreast of relevant developments and comply with NEPS/DE policy at all times.

The process of a SCPA assessment will typically involve:

A. Selection of Students for Individual Psychological Assessment

The selection of students for assessment under the scheme will take into consideration (at primary level) the NEPS/DE document "Special Educational Needs – A Continuum of Support – Guidelines for Teachers" or (at post-primary level) the document entitled "A Continuum of Support for Post-primary Schools – Guidelines for Teachers". Click on the following link to access the [NEPS Continuum of Support](#) documents.

The continuum of support described in these guidelines encompasses a model of assessment and intervention comprised of three distinct school-based processes, which may be summarised as follows:

- Classroom Support (at Primary level)/Support for All (at Post-primary level): a documented process of prevention, effective early intervention and identification, often coordinated by the class teacher and carried out within the regular classroom.
- School Support (at Primary level)/Support for Some (at Post-primary level): an assessment and intervention process, which supports some students, often in small groups, usually coordinated by the learning support/resource teacher working in collaboration with the class or subject teacher.
- School Support Plus (at Primary level)/Support for a Few (at Post-primary level): a process which is generally characterised by more individual and intensive supports. This level of intervention is designed to cater for students with complex and/or enduring needs whose progress is considered inadequate despite carefully planned interventions at the previous levels.

Normally, psychological assessment under the scheme will only be considered for a student whose needs are at the level of "School Support Plus" or "Support for a Few", as described in the Continuum of Support Guidelines. Parents will already be fully aware of the concerns about their child's progress.

In most cases, a final selection of the student for a SCPA assessment will be made by the school principal (or a nominated teacher) in collaboration with the NEPS psychologist attached to the school.

When a decision has been made, the NEPS psychologist will give a SCPA Sanction Form to the school principal (copied to the SCPA administrator) authorising the assessment.

Where a school is temporarily without a direct NEPS service due, for example, to maternity leave or sick leave, SCPA assessments must be sanctioned (in writing) by the local NEPS Regional Director.

B. Consultation with Parents/Guardians

Parents/ guardians should be fully consulted at all stages – selection, assessment, feedback and intervention.

If it appears pertinent, parents should be encouraged to make early arrangements to have their child's vision and hearing tested and/or to have other evaluations carried out by relevant health professionals.

Written consent by parents or legal guardians is an absolute requirement under the terms of this scheme.

C. Step-by-Step Procedure to be followed by Schools in Implementing the Scheme

Principals of schools that are eligible to avail of the scheme shall:

1. Select students requiring individual psychological assessment, as outlined above.
2. Arrange a formal meeting with the student's parents or legal guardians, discussing the reasons for the assessment, and explaining, as necessary, each section of the Consent Form (Form 1), before inviting the parents/guardians to sign Form 1.

Where both parents/guardians have legal custody, each must sign the Consent Form; if one parent/guardian has legal custody, then that signature will suffice but the other parent/guardian must be made aware of the referral.

Written consent by parents or legal guardians is an absolute requirement under the terms of this scheme.

Clearly inform parents/guardians in advance that the charges associated with the assessment carried out under this scheme are met in their entirety by NEPS/DE.

3. In collaboration with the parents and discussing the contents fully with them, complete a Referral Form (Form 2) for the assessment.
4. Commission a psychologist on the SCPA panel to carry out the assessments. It should be noted that all psychologists on the SCPA panel have completed the Garda vetting process and that schools may only commission psychologists who are on the current SCPA panel.

The current SCPA panel is regularly updated and is available in the NEPS section of the DE website – click on the following link to access the [current SCPA Panel](#).

5. Consult with parents/guardians about how best to prepare the student for assessment, taking account of his/her age. Some students feel more comfortable knowing what to expect, while others become nervous if told in advance. Psychologists sometimes like to observe students in class, and in such instances it may be better if the student is not told in advance.
6. Arrange for the assessment to be carried out **in the school, during school hours**¹
Note: The NEPS/DE expect that it will take most of a school day to complete an assessment under this scheme.

¹ *In very exceptional circumstances, a SCPA psychologist may be granted permission to carry out an individual assessment off the school premises. Having first consulted with the school principal, such requests should be made by the SCPA psychologist, to the SCPA manager, in writing, at least 3 weeks before the proposed assessment date. The school principal will have obtained written approval from the parents/guardians for the assessment to take place off-site.*

Requests should be sent to scpa@education.gov.ie stating the reasons why the assessment cannot be carried out in the student's school and full details of what is proposed as an alternative, including how feedback to the parents and student's teacher will be arranged.

Each request will be considered by the SCPA Manager on a case by case basis.

7. Provide details of the student's Student Support Plan to the psychologist as appropriate. Results of diagnostic and screening tests should also be made available at the outset.
8. Facilitate appropriate arrangements for meetings between the parents/guardians, teachers and the psychologist.
9. Complete the Certification of Completion of Assessment Form (Form 3) at the conclusion of the process - when a report and feedback have been provided. Completion of Form 3 certifies to NEPS that the assessment has been carried out in accordance with the terms and conditions of the scheme, as laid down by the NEPS/DE.
10. School principals and psychologists must ensure that the pupil's details on the report supplied are consistent with the details entered on Form 3.
11. Send the completed **Certification of Completion of Assessment Form (Form 3) and a copy of the psychological report (printed one sided) to:**

**SCPA Administrator, NEPS
Department of Education and Skills, Floor 2,
Block 1
Marlborough Street,
Dublin 1**

12. Subsequently ensure that recommendations in the psychological report are implemented by relevant personnel, and assist parents, where practicable, with onward referrals to other agencies.

Fees for Psychological Assessments Conducted under the Scheme

The full payment for SCPA assessments is covered by the DE/NEPS. Therefore in no circumstances should there be a charge to parents/guardians or to schools for assessments carried out under the scheme.

Procedure for Payment under the Scheme

The payment process will be initiated upon receipt, by NEPS, of a Certificate of Completion of Assessment Form (Form 3) and a copy of the relevant psychological report, in respect of each individual assessment.

Form 3 must be fully completed and signed by the school principal and psychologist and the original (not a copy) submitted to NEPS, by the principal, within three calendar months of the date of assessment. This form will certify that the terms and conditions of the scheme have been fully complied with. NEPS will arrange for payment to be made directly to the psychologist.

Further Information

Queries should be submitted to NEPS in writing, either by e-mail scpa@education.gov.ie or by conventional mail to:

SCPA Manager
NEPS (National Education Psychology Service)
Department of Education
2nd Floor, West Wing
The Herbert Building, The Park

Carrickmines, Dublin 18.
D18K 8Y4

Every effort will be made to respond to queries as soon as possible.

Complaints should be dealt with at point of service, between the school principal and the psychologist. Where informal efforts to resolve difficulties have failed, complainants may invoke the formal Department of Education (DE) Complaints Procedure, which is available to download using the following link – [Complaints Procedure](#).

Scheme for the Commissioning of Psychological Assessments (SCPA)

General Disclaimers

Terms and conditions of the scheme are subject to ongoing review. They may be changed or updated at any time and without notice by the Minister for Education and Skills.

The SCPA panel is not a register of psychologists. Membership of the panel is not to be confused with eligibility for statutory registration of psychologists.

In accepting a psychologist as a member of the panel, NEPS/DE is not entering into any contractual arrangement with the psychologist. SCPA psychologists are not employees of the NEPS/DE.

Membership of the SCPA panel confers no particular rights on psychologists and does not provide any guarantee of being commissioned to administer psychological tests in schools.

In any given year, unless otherwise stated, membership of the SCPA panel is generally valid from date of appointment until the end of that school year only.

NEPS/DE reserves the right to remove a psychologist from the SCPA panel at any time. The scheme may be discontinued at any time by the Minister for Education and Skills.

NEPS/DE is not a disciplinary body for psychologists. Such matters are more properly the remit of the particular psychologist's professional body.

Web links:

SCPA –Scheme for the Commissioning of Psychological Assessments Guidelines and Relevant Documents:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/service/5ef45c-neps/>

DE Complaints Procedure

<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/71632/?page=null>

Children First E-Learning Programme

<https://www.tusla.ie/children-first/children-first-e-learning-programme/>

National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) Resources and Publications :

<https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/97aa18-national-educational-psychological-service-neps-resources-and-public/>

Behavioural, Social and Emotional Difficulties (Primary and post Primary):

<https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/97aa18-national-educational-psychological-service-neps-resources-and-public/>

Literacy Resources:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/97aa18-national-educational-psychological-service-neps-resources-and-public/>

Guidelines for Primary Schools on Exemptions from the Study of Irish

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7028e-exemptions-from-the-study-of-irish-guidelines-for-primary-schools/>

Psychological Society of Ireland. (2022). *PSI Guidelines – Confidentiality and Record Keeping in Practice*. Dublin: Author.

<https://www.psychologicalsociety.ie/footer/Guidelines-Policies--Papers>

Psychological Society of Ireland. (2011). *Code of Professional Ethics*. Dublin: Author.

<https://www.psychologicalsociety.ie/Article/Code-of-Ethics-1>