



Summer Programme 2024 – ‘Building Confidence and Connections’

March 2024

Dear Principal,

I am writing to let you know about this year’s Summer Programme and to highlight a pilot scheme being put in place specifically for special schools. Ministers Foley and Madigan have announced a package of supports to allow schools to offer a summer programme for children with complex special educational needs and those at greatest risk of educational disadvantage. We really hope your school will consider running a programme. For 2024, one of the main priorities is that more children in special schools have access to a school-based programme.

The central theme for this year’s programme continues to be ‘Building Confidence and Connections’. The primary aim of this theme is to help our children and young people to realise their potential, to be resilient in dealing with the normal stresses of their lives, to take care of their physical wellbeing and to have a sense of purpose, connection and belonging to their school community.

In 2023 the Department introduced a new pilot programme for special schools which again continues in 2024. The Special School Pilot Programme recognises the complexities of organising a summer programme in special school environments and has been designed to ensure supports are targeted. These targeted measures include a higher level of capitation, additional grant funding, faster pay times for staff working on the programme and systems to reduce the administrative burden associated with leading and managing a school-based programme.

The National Summer Programme Coordinator will continue liaising with special schools to facilitate the organisation of programmes for schools. This will include identifying and addressing staffing requirements, offering advice on administration and training, supporting schools in identifying available places for children and addressing if a potential school grouping arrangements are necessary.

In 2024, a new initiative known as the **Special School Student Teacher Placement** is being introduced. As part of this initiative, graduate teachers and PME student teachers who are in their final year can work as a student teacher in a Special School and on the Summer Programme. Schools will be able to recruit up to two student teachers from May 2024 (or on completion of exams) until the end of the school based summer programme. This will allow student teachers to gain valuable relevant experience in a special education setting and will assist special schools during a very busy period in their school year. It will also assist with familiarisation and preparation leading into a summer programme.



This year's programme also continues with the Organiser role, replacing preparation hours in previous years, to help support schools in their planning and participation from an earlier stage in the school year. The functions for the Summer Programme Manager role remains largely the same from previous years.

The length of the day is being reduced from the full school day to 10am – 2pm. The same daily rate will be paid to staff taking part. This again recognises the challenges associated with running the programme in a special school, including break time routines and transport concerns.

Further details are contained below:-

School Organiser Role

Continuing on from 2023, instead of preparation hours, there will again be a dedicated role of School Organiser in each school offering the summer programme in 2024. This is envisaged to be a key leadership role that will offer development opportunities for staff in schools. In special schools, this role will attract additional remuneration in recognition of the complexities of organising the programme in that environment. The School Organiser in all schools will develop the school's summer programme and have responsibility for recruitment of staff employed by the school for the Summer Programme.

While Principals can undertake this role, the intention is to alleviate pressure from school management and present an opportunity for other teachers. In special schools, the School Organiser will be supported by the National Coordinator especially in terms of workforce availability, planning and preparation.

Summer Programme Manager

In all Special schools, each school can appoint one Summer Programme Manager. This can be the same person as the School Organiser.

The Organiser and Manager roles provide an exciting professional opportunity for teachers to develop their leadership skills and to gain management experience both at a whole-school and career development level.

Online Payment of Staff

The online payments system for staff that was introduced in 2022 will be in place again for 2024. Further improvements will be made to the system for 2024 and this will ensure that staff who take part in the school-based programme are paid as quickly and efficiently as possible.

External Staff

Schools can engage substitute teachers and SNAs from outside of their school if the staff normally employed by the school are not available. The Teaching Council and the Irish Primary Principal's Network (IPPN) will promote the summer programmes with this year's



graduate teachers and undergraduate students registered under Route 5 to increase the supply of available teachers this summer via <https://www.educationposts.ie/>. This will support recruitment of staff for posts in the primary and post-primary sector.

School Transport

School transport services may be available to students who avail of services under the SEN transport scheme. It is really important that this process runs smoothly for you and your school. Therefore, it is essential to submit School Transport Application Forms as soon as possible as doing so will allow the Department's School Transport Section to provide timely confirmation to schools.

Where services are not available for students who normally avail of SEN transport scheme, grant funding is payable to parents following completion of the programme.

Support and Guidance

If you have any queries please email schoolsummerprogramme@education.gov.ie or call 090 648 4292. Full details on the schemes including available supports is available at gov.ie/summerprogramme.

Based on a recent Inspectorate report conducted on the Summer Programme 2023, it was observed that where a summer programme has taken place, not only has it enhanced the well-being and learning of the children during the summer, but it also positively impacted on their performance upon their return to school or eased their transition to Post-Primary school. To view this report, please go to [gov - Inspectorate publications: Evaluation reports and guidelines \(www.gov.ie\)](http://gov.ie/inspectorate/publications/evaluation-reports-and-guidelines).

Your co-operation and support for this year's programme is paramount in making it a success and I would greatly appreciate if you could give time to consider running a programme in your school this year. We understand that special schools are incredibly busy places during the school year and the work and dedication from you and your staff is much appreciated. The National Coordinator will be reaching out directly to your school and other special schools in your region to assist and support in trying to get a solution to making a programme work for those children that need it the most.

Yours faithfully

Frank Hanlon
Principal Officer
Special Education Section