An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Circular No 0070/2022

To: Management Authorities of recognised Post Primary Schools: Secondary, Community and Comprehensive Schools and the Chief Executive Officers of the Education and Training Boards

Enhancement to Irish Sign Language (ISL) Scheme provision

1. Purpose of this Circular and background

The purpose of this Circular is to advise schools of the details of the new enhancement scheme which was announced on the 2nd March 2022 by the Minister for Education Norma Foley TD and Minister of State for Special Education and Inclusion Josepha Madigan TD.

The scheme provides for provision of Irish Sign Language in-school support for students who are Deaf and whose primary means of communication is ISL.

The circular confirms details of how the scheme is being implemented, the criteria for student inclusion in the initial phase of the scheme and the application process.

2. Implementation of the enhanced scheme.

It is important that we provide support under the scheme for all children who rely on Irish Sign Language for communication.

The scheme is being implemented on a phased basis.

The reason for a phased approach is to allow for learning and improvement.

The first phase is about ensuring that the available skilled resources are harnessed and focussed where they are needed the most. This phase will then inform us on how best to develop the scheme further.

The review of the first phase will inform us on how best to develop the scheme further.

The new scheme is in addition to the existing provision that is in place, in the form of the role of Special Needs Assistant with ISL competency to support students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing and whose primary language is ISL.

Over time, this existing provision will be replaced with a new role of ISL Specialist Classroom Support, the ISL SCS.

The Department is introducing two roles to the education system to support pupils and the wider school communities and they are as follows.
These are

1. ISL- Specialist Classroom Support role, which is shortened to ISL-SCS.
2. ISL Advisor role.

3. ISL Specialist Classroom Support (ISL –SCS)

In developing the new scheme, it is recognised that the primary educator in a school is the class teacher, who is qualified and registered with the Teaching Council. For all students in the education system, the key education provider in a recognised classroom is a qualified teacher.

The new ISL roles are not teaching roles but are being put in place for students who are Deaf to support them in accessing the curriculum, participating in school life and achieving good educational outcomes.

The new roles under the scheme will support the work of the class teachers and complement other teaching and care supports provided for the students who meet the criteria.

The focus of the ISL - Specialist Classroom Support (ISL-SCS) will be targeted to meet the needs of students attending a recognised mainstream school whose primary means of communication is ISL and who meet the criteria outlined below.

The ISL - SCS will convey the spirit and content of the communication occurring in the classroom to the student. They will mediate the curriculum for the student using ISL and enhance their active engagement and participation with learning and school life.

The ISL-SCS will work under the direction of the class teacher and collaborate with the class teacher and the special education Teacher (SET) in the development and review of student support plans, as necessary.

The ISL – Specialist Classroom Support will take the time to understand and process the content, the context and the messages being delivered by the teacher thereby mediating the curriculum for the student whose communication is primarily through ISL.

Only ISL –SCS who are appropriately qualified and fluent in ISL will be appointed to this new roles. This is of critical importance to the Department and the NCSE and a key requirement of the scheme.

4. Application process for ISL –SCS support for a student

- School makes contact with the local SENO for general advice
- School requests application form from isl@ncse.ie
- School completes application form and submits by email - this application must be supported by a report from medical consultant confirming the condition (evidenced by Radiology/MRI scan) meets the above criteria.
- NCSE processes the application
- NCSE makes recommendation to Department of Education on the application.
- If successful, the Department will sanction the resource allocation for the pupil

5. ISL Advisor Role

The department is taking a holistic approach to supporting pupils who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing by introducing a second role of ISL Advisor.

The focus of the ISL Advisor will be on development and upskilling of the whole school communities to support the further development of an inclusive environment for such pupils.

The primary functions of the ISL Advisor are as follows:

- The ISL Advisor will support schools in the development of a whole school approach to meeting the needs of students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing and whose primary means of communication is ISL.
- The ISL Advisor will provide a programme of professional learning and support the school community (including teachers, ISL-SCS, special needs assistants, other school staff and a student's peers) to build capacity in a student's environment in relation to supporting communication using ISL.
- The ISL Advisor will also support and upskilling school community (teachers, ISL – SCS, SNAs etc.) in ISL to enrich access to, and to enhance the delivery of, the curriculum to this cohort of students, along with supporting a student's access to and participation in school activities.
- An Advisor may also support the school and other professionals in planning for the transitioning of students of ISL into the school setting and onto other education placements as required.

Only ISL Advisors who are appropriately qualified and fluent in ISL will be appointed to these new roles. This is of critical importance to the Department and the NCSE and a key requirement of the scheme.

6. Application process for ISL Advisor support

Where a school believes they can benefit from the support of an ISL advisor in developing whole school ISL for pupils the application process is as follows:

Schools apply for the ISL Advisor through the NCSE.

Applications can be made on the NCSE Website at https://ncse.ie/in-school-support .

7. Criteria for access to the ISL SCS in the Phase 1 of the scheme

The new and enhanced scheme of support is being introduced initially to support those students attending a mainstream school whose primary means of communication is ISL and who meet two specific criteria.

1. The first is that the child has absent, hypoplastic or poorly functioning bilateral auditory nerves.
2. The second is medical confirmation that hearing aids and/ or cochlear implants are not a viable option to help hearing due to what medical professionals refer to as the anatomical structure of the cochlea.

The Department understands that aligning the first phase to specific medical requirements may cause concern within the Deaf community. In acknowledging this, we want to ensure that the approach is being taken on the basis of ensuring that available resources are focussed on supporting pupils and families where specific intensive support is required in order to access the curriculum.

8. Operation of the enhanced scheme

The NCSE is responsible for coordinating supports for all students with special educational needs and the delivery of these new supports will be managed by the NCSE through its regional team structure.

The ISL-SCS will be an employee of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and will be seconded to a recognised mainstream school under criteria set out by the Department of Education. The school principal will manage the day to day work of the ISL SCS.

The ISL Adviser will be an employee of the NCSE and will support the relevant school who have applied for their services.

.

This circular can be accessed on the Department's website: gov.ie - Special Education Section (www.gov.ie)

Frank Hanlon
Principal Officer
Special Education

October 2022