Ms. Éilis Fallon  
Committee Secretariat  
Committee of Public Accounts  
Leinster House  
Dublin 2  

REF: PAC32-I-1632  
6th November, 2019  

Dear Ms Fallon,

I am writing to you in response to your letter to me of 29th October, 2019, regarding two issues which were raised at the Committee of Public Accounts Meeting of 17th October, 2019 (item 2438).

**Alleged misuse of SEN allocations and resources**

The first issue relates to allegations made by an individual, who represents a group which has alleged that there is a misuse of special education teachers in schools.

I wish to advise in the first instance, that in allocating Special Education Teacher posts to schools, that there is no actual allocation of funds to schools in relation to these positions.

Once the allocations of posts/hours are made to schools, and filled by schools in accordance with the Department’s criteria, the personnel are paid directly via the Department of Education and Skills payroll system.

A new model for allocating special education teachers was introduced for mainstream schools from September 2017. The new Special Education Teaching allocation provides a single allocation for special educational support teaching needs to each school, based on that school’s educational profile.

This allocation is made to allow schools to provide additional teaching support for all pupils who require such support in their schools and does not require children to have a formal diagnosis, or an application procedure, as a pre-condition to access teaching resources.

Through the new allocation model, a very significant allocation of Special Education Teacher (SET) posts is allocated to schools. For 2019, there are over 13,500 SET posts in the school system.
Schools have autonomy to decide how to deploy the resources they have, based on the needs of pupils in their school and in accordance with the criteria set out in the DES Circulars and guidance.

DES Circulars 013 and 014 2017 set out the criteria for the allocation of Special Education Teachers to schools. Accompanying Guidelines are also provided for schools on how they should manage their allocations of special education teachers.

Copies of the Circulars and Guidance for schools are enclosed.

In relation to the management of special education teachers by schools, Section 22 of the Circulars, on the Utilisation of additional teaching resources for pupils with special educational needs, states that resources to support pupils should be deployed in accordance with the Guidelines provided to accompany the Circulars.

The Circulars state that schools should ensure that the additional Special Educational Needs Teaching supports are used in their entirety to support pupils identified with special educational needs, learning support needs, and additional literacy needs such as English Additional Language Support.

The additional Teaching Resources which are being provided under this model cannot be used for mainstream class teaching, or to reduce the pupil teacher ratio in mainstream classes, or to provide additional subjects for pupils who do not have special educational needs.

The guidelines set out that whereas schools have some flexibility in relation to the manner in which they deploy their additional teaching support, that special education teaching resources must be used only to provide for additional teaching support for qualifying pupils, and the coordination of such activities.

Where it has been reported to the Department that a school may be incorrectly deploying Special Education Teachers, the Department writes to schools to request that they review the provision of additional special education teaching support in the school and confirm that the school is utilising its allocation of special education teachers in accordance with the guidelines and to provide a copy of the schools timetables.

Since the introduction of the new model for allocating special education teachers to schools was introduced from September 2017, 88 reports of a potentially inappropriate use of special education teaching resource have been made to the Department (71 primary schools and 17 post primary schools). The majority of such reports arise from school inspection reports.

The number of such reports should be seen in the context of the allocations of over 13,500 special education teaching posts to approximately 4000 primary and post primary schools.

They should also be seen in the context of approximately 1500 schools inspections (Whole School Evaluations, Special Education inspections and Incidental Inspections) conducted since Sept 2017. Whereas the primary purpose of these inspections is not to uncover inappropriate deployment of SETs, where an inappropriate use of a resource is found, it is reported, and the Department takes action in relation to each such report received.
Where the Department has written to the schools to request the schools review their provision and confirm that the school is utilising its allocation in accordance with guidelines and provide copies of timetables, 34 schools have now confirmed that they are now utilising their allocation in accordance with the guidelines, 29 schools have replied and are being reviewed, replies are awaited from 20 schools while the Department are continuing to engage with 5 schools who have not yet been in a position to demonstrate compliance.

Further follow up action may then take place with schools, including an Inspection visit, if necessary.

Where a person makes a disclosure to the Department of Education and Skills under the terms of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014, the Department deals with such cases in accordance with the provisions of this Act.

In carrying out any examinations of such disclosures, the Department therefore does not provide details of the identity of the person making a disclosure and takes all reasonable steps to avoid disclosing information which might identify them.

The Department is currently dealing with one case of reported misuse of special education teaching resources which has been reported to the Department under the terms of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014.

The Department also previously dealt with one other case of reported misuse of special education teaching resources reported under the Protected Disclosures Act.

**Departmental oversight of school expenditure and school grant systems**

You have also requested details as to the manner in which the Department of Education and Skills has oversight of school expenditure and grant systems.

As noted at the Committee of Public Accounts Meeting of 17th October, 2019 (item 2438), the bulk of funding which is provided for schools by the Department of Education and Skills relates to the payment of salaries for teachers and other staff in the school, such as Special Needs Assistants.

Such personnel are paid directly via the Department of Education and Skills payroll system and no actual funding is provided to schools for these positions.

In relation to other funding which is provided to schools through the capitation system, or through grant payments, there are a range of obligations which Boards of Management are required to fulfil in relation to the governance and financial management of schools.

In accordance with the provisions of the Education Act 1998, the board of management is the body charged with the direct governance of a school.

Boards of management are required to comply with the provisions of the Education Act 1998, the relevant rules for schools and the terms of Circulars issued by the Department of Education and Skills.
Section 15 of the Education Act, 1998 requires the board of management, in carrying out its functions, to have regard to the efficient use of resources and, in particular, to the efficient use of State funds. Boards therefore have a statutory duty to ensure that appropriate systems and procedures are in place to ensure school financial resources including grants are managed appropriately and efficiently and in a manner that provides for appropriate accountability to the relevant parties. All expenditure by or on behalf of the board of management must be approved by the Board and by the relevant ETB in ETB schools.

In accordance with Section 18 of the Education Act 1998, schools (other than those established or maintained by an ETB) are required to keep all proper and usual accounts and records of all monies received by it or expenditure of such monies incurred by it and must ensure that in each year all such accounts are properly audited or certified in accordance with best accounting practice. The accounts of ETB schools form part of the accounts of the relevant ETB.

The Act further requires that such accounts shall be made available by the school for inspection by the Minister and by parents of students in the school, in so far as those accounts relate to monies provided in accordance with section 12 of the Act.


The four year term of office for the current Boards of Management of all primary schools will come to an end on 30 November 2019 and the changeover to new Boards will take place from 1 December 2019. The Department of Education and Skills published in September 2019 the updated “Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2019 – 2023” following consultation with the education partners. The “Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2015 – 2019” continues to apply to existing Boards up to the end of their term of office on 30 November 2019.

This manual sets out very clearly the specific responsibilities and duties of the Board in relation to school finances, accounting practice and the role and duties of the treasurer appointed by the Board. Amongst the specific control measures to safeguard against fraud or misappropriation of school funds, the manual requires that:

• All expenditure by or on behalf of the Board of Management must be approved by the Board.

• The Board must satisfy itself that proper internal controls are in place for all financial transactions.

• A total account of the Board's income and expenditure must be prepared at the end of each school year and must be properly audited or certified in accordance with best accounting practice. This account should be made available for inspection to the school community including parents, the Patron, Trustees and the Minister.

• Copies of this account shall be presented to the Board and a copy retained as part of the minutes of the board of management.

• The school accounts shall also be available for audit by officers of the Department and officials of the Comptroller and Auditor General's Office if requested.
In primary schools (other than community national schools) the manual also requires that:

- The Treasurer must retain vouchers of expenditure for inspection and audit by the school’s accountant and by officials of the Department.

- The Treasurer must present at each Board meeting an up-to-date statement of the school accounts giving details of income and expenditure since the previous meeting.

In the case of community national schools there is no requirement to elect a treasurer and financial matters shall at all times be managed and comply with the financial policy of the relevant ETB.

In the case of voluntary secondary schools the financial responsibilities of the Board are detailed in the Articles of Management. In this regard the school must submit annual accounts in respect of each financial year ending 31 August. The annual accounts must be formally approved by the management authority of the school and must be forwarded to the Financial Support Services Unit (FSSU) of the Joint Managerial Body (JMB) by 1 December following the end of the financial year. The accounts must be accompanied by such other information as the FSSU may require from time to time. This requirement applies to all voluntary secondary schools, including fee charging schools.

In the case of Community and Comprehensive schools the financial responsibilities of the board are set out in their governing document. The board of management must prepare a financial report in respect of each financial year ending on 31 December. This report, formally approved by the Board must be forwarded to the Department by mid-February following the end of the financial year. The completed accounts must be accompanied by such other information as the Minister may require from time to time.

For Education and Training Board (ETB) Schools, the ETB is the corporate entity and has ultimate responsibility for financial matters. ETB schools shall at all times be managed and comply with the financial policy of the relevant ETB in accordance with the requirements of the Code of Practice for the Governance of Education and Training Boards, statutory provision, relevant Department circulars and best practice guidelines set out by the Department and the ETB.

The accounts of schools established and maintained by an Education and Training Board form part of the accounts of the relevant ETB. In respect of ETBs, annual accounts must be submitted no later than the 1st April in the year following the end of the accounting period to which they relate, to the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General for audit.

The Financial Support Services Unit (FSSU) also supports Departmental oversight of school expenditure and school grant systems in Primary, Voluntary Secondary, Community and Comprehensive Schools.

The FSSU is an important source of advice and support for school management and finance personnel on financial governance matters and enables them to comply with the provisions of the Education Act 1998 in terms of accountability, transparency and financial responsibility for State funds.
All Boards of Management are obliged to comply with Section 18 of the Education Act 1998 and the arrangements set out in the Department’s circulars 0060/2017 and 0002/2018 in relation to the operation of the FSSU. This includes the submission of accounts to the FSSU in the prescribed format, and by an external accountant/auditor who has a current Practicing Certificate, Professional Indemnity Insurance and is registered with a prescribed accountancy body in the State.

The FSSU carry out Financial Internal Control Reviews and audits at the request of the Department and School Patrons.

An Internal Audit Unit (IAU) also supports the ETBs’ Audit Committees that the system. The IAU operates on a shared services model providing an internal audit service to all 16 ETBs nationwide.

The Financial Statements of the ETBs provide detailed information on funding from all sources and how it was used. These annual accounts, when finalised and audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General, are published on the Oireachtas website.

A number of process are therefore in place to ensure oversight of school expenditure and grant systems. I will be happy to provide you with more information in relation to this issues should you require it.

Should you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Séan Ó Foghlú
Secretary General
Circular No 0013/2017

Circular to the Management Authorities of all Mainstream Primary Schools

Special Education Teaching Allocation

1. Purpose

The purpose of this Circular is to advise schools of the revised allocation process for Special Education Teachers to mainstream primary schools from the 2017/18 school year.

This revised allocation process will replace the General Allocation Model and English as Additional Language Support (GAM/EAL) scheme, whereby a general allocation of resources had previously been allocated to primary schools annually.

It will also replace the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocation process which provided additional resource teaching supports to schools, to support pupils who had been assessed as having Low Incidence disabilities, in accordance with DES Circular 02/2005.

The new Special Education Teaching allocation will provide a single unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs to each school, based on that school’s educational profile.

This single allocation is being made to allow schools to provide additional teaching support for all pupils who require such support in their schools.

Schools will deploy resources based on each pupil’s individual learning needs.

The manner in which the profiled allocations have been developed for each school is set out in Sections 6 and 7 of this Circular.
The new allocation model will ensure that schools will have greater certainty as to the resources that will be available to them to provide additional teaching to support the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs, on an ongoing basis. This will allow schools to better plan and timetable for this provision. The earlier allocation process will also allow schools to plan in advance of the school year.

The new model will provide a greater level of autonomy for schools in how to manage and deploy additional teaching support within their school, based on the individual learning needs of pupils, as opposed to being based primarily on a diagnosis of disability.

In order to support schools in how they should identify and provide for the learning needs of pupils, this Circular is being accompanied by Guidelines for Schools on the organisation, deployment and use of special education teachers to address the need of pupils with special educational needs.

The Guidelines for Primary Schools: Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools has been developed by the National Educational Psychological Services, the Inspectorate and Special Education Section.

2. Support for the Introduction of the New Allocation Model

Significant additional resources are being made available to provide extra Special Education Teaching posts for allocation to schools from September 2017, in order to support the introduction of this model.

These additional resources will assist schools to transition from the existing allocation system that has been in place in recent years, to the new profiled allocation model, with minimal disruption.

The additional provision which is being made to support the new model will ensure that no school will receive an allocation of special education teaching resources, arising from the introduction of the new allocation model, which is less than the combined allocation the school received under their GAM/EAL and NCSE allocations for the 2016/17 school year.

These resources will ensure that all schools can continue to meet the special educational and learning support needs of all children in their school.
Schools which are due to receive increased allocations from September 2017, under the revised model, which is based on their school profiles, will receive additional allocations from September 2017 and retain these allocations until the next re profiling takes place.

Schools which would have nominally been due to receive reduced allocations from September 2017, under the revised allocation process, based on their school profiles, will maintain their existing 2016/17 school year allocations and retain these allocations for the course of the model, until the next profiling takes place.

The additional resources being provided to support this model means that no school will lose special educational teaching resources, on the introduction of this model, while extra resources will be placed in schools where the profile indicates that needs are greatest.

Any future adjustments to the allocations for schools will take place on a graduated basis, which will take account of changes to school enrolments, and the pupil population, including the number of pupils in the complex needs category, since the initial allocations were developed.

3. Revision of Profiles

In recommending the introduction of a new model for allocating additional teaching supports to schools the NCSE Working Group Report (2014) recommended that the additional teaching supports would be left in place initially for a two year period.

The allocations which are being made will therefore initially remain in place for a minimum of two years, following which, revised profiled allocations will be due to be made to schools from September 2019.

4. Background

The current system for allocating additional teaching resources to schools, based on valid applications for additional teaching support for pupils with special educational needs, in mainstream primary schools, was originally implemented in 1999 (Circular 08/99).
This system allocated varying levels of resource teaching hours to schools to support individual pupils with assessed special educational needs. The scheme was reviewed and revised in 2002 and 2003 through *Circulars 08/02 and 24/03*. Under the terms of these circulars, pupils with assessed learning disabilities in ordinary classes in mainstream primary schools were allocated resource teaching support in accordance with the level of support applicable for that category of disability.

*Special Education Circular 02/05* introduced a General Allocation Model for all mainstream primary schools. This provided a generalised system of allocation of supports, for pupils with learning support needs, and for pupils with certain categories of high incidence special educational needs, as defined by *Circular 02/05*. Schools who had enrolled pupils with Low Incidence special educational needs (as defined by *Circular 02/05*), continued to receive such allocations from the NCSE in addition to their GAM allocations.

From the 2012/13 school year onwards, the General Allocation Model was expanded to also include a general provision for English as an Additional Language (EAL) Support as set out in DES Circular 007/2012. Schools with high concentrations of pupils requiring EAL support also received additional teaching allocations to make provision for such concentrated needs and this provision will remain in place. General Allocation Model/EAL allocations were, since the 2012/13 school year, subsequently updated annually for schools each year as part of the staffing arrangements for primary schools for each school year.

The new allocation model will provide allocations based on the profiled needs of each school, which will replace the existing system of a GAM/EAL allocation for schools along with NCSE allocated Low Incidence allocations, where relevant.

This Circular therefore replaces DES Circulars SP Ed 02/05, 08/99, 24/03, and 08/02. It also replaces Circulars 30/2011 which made further adjustments to the scheme and DES Circular 07/2012, which introduced revised arrangements of the General Allocation Model as part of the Primary School Staffing arrangements for the 2012/13 school year, and subsequent annual Primary School Staffing Arrangement Circulars thereafter, the most recent of which was 07/2016.
The National Council for Special Education has a statutory function, under the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004, to provide the Minister for Education and Skills with policy advice in relation to the education of children and others with disabilities or special educational needs.


In particular, the NCSE reported that:

- The existing allocation system was inequitable, as some children could experience delays in accessing support because of delays in accessing assessments which are required for the allocation of Resource Teaching hours.

- The General Allocation Model, which is used to allocate Learning Support teachers, is inequitable as it takes little account of the differing needs of different schools, as allocations are made on the basis of the number of mainstream teachers in each school.

- There is a real risk that children are being diagnosed as having a special educational need for resource allocation purposes rather than such a diagnosis being required for medical reasons.

- There is a spectrum of ability and disability within every category of special educational need. The current system allocates the same level of support for pupils within certain categories of special educational needs even though one pupil may have a greater need for support than another, with the same disability.

This report recommended that the current Special Needs Teacher allocation model should be replaced by a new model to allocate supports on the basis of the profiled educational needs of schools.

It proposed that the allocation of additional teaching supports to schools be, in future, based on a school’s educational profile, comprised of two components:

- Baseline component provided to every mainstream school to support inclusion, assistance with learning difficulties and early intervention, and

- A school educational profile component, which takes into account:
  - The number of pupils with complex needs enrolled to the school.
  - The learning support needs of pupils as evidenced by standardised test results.
  - The social context of the school including disadvantage and gender.

The combination of a baseline allocation based on school enrolments and a profiled allocation will give a fairer allocation for each school which recognises that all schools need an allocation for special needs support, but which provides a graduated allocation which takes into account the level of need, whether future or predicted, and pupil mixture in each school.

The allocations, which are being provided for schools from September 2017, are based on the profiled allocations for each school, which are calculated as follows:

6. Baseline component provided to every mainstream primary school to support inclusion, assistance with learning difficulties, and early intervention

The Working Group recommended that a baseline allocation of teaching resources to all mainstream schools, allocated in line with overall enrolment numbers, should be a core component of the new model.

This baseline allocation will ensure that all schools have a minimum allocation of teaching resources to support inclusion, assistance with learning difficulties and early intervention. The baseline component will support schools in having whole school policies and practices in place to minimise the emergence of low achievement and learning difficulties. The baseline is provided in addition to the resources calculated under the other elements used in establishing the school’s educational profile.
The baseline allocation will also ensure that schools can continue to enrol and support pupils with additional needs over the course of time that the profile remains in place and pending any review of the schools profile.

**The Baseline allocation of each school profile is made up of 20% of the total number of Resource/Learning Support posts in the system allocated to schools for the 2016/17 school year, redistributed on an equal basis, proportionately, between all schools, based on each school’s enrolment numbers for the 2015/16 school year, which is the most complete recent enrolment data available.**

It should be noted that the baseline allocation under the new model cannot be compared to the general allocation received under the old system. This is an entirely new and different model, and not simply an adjustment of the old model. For a complete overview of their additional teaching allocation under the new model, schools must consider their baseline allocation, alongside the allocation they receive under the educational profile component, which gives them their total allocation.

**The baseline also does not represent 20% of your individual school’s allocation from last year, but 20% of the total Learning Support and Resource Teaching allocations, distributed equally between schools, according to school enrolment numbers.**

7. **School Educational Profile.**

7.1 **The number of pupils with complex needs enrolled to the school.**

For the introduction of the new allocation model, from September 2017, the NCSE ‘Low Incidence’ allocations which had been made for each school during the preceding 2016/17 school year, have been used to establish the complex needs component of the new model for each school.

These allocations include the additional allocations for Resource Teaching support made to schools in 2015 and 2016 to support pupils with Down syndrome who were in the mild general learning difficulty range and not previously included in the Low Incidence allocations.

**This means that on the introduction of the new allocation model and until allocations are reviewed, no school will receive an allocation, for the support of pupils with complex needs, which is less than**
the allocation they had received to support pupils with Low Incidence special educational needs during the 2016/17 school year.

This also means that no allocation for pupils made by the NCSE will be removed from schools as long as that pupil remains in the school.

Whereas schools will have greater discretion as to how they can distribute resources under the new model, based on the individual needs of pupils, no reduction in allocations have been made to schools in respect of any pupils who were previously in receipt of a Low Incidence special needs allocation in that school.

A model for the identification of pupils with complex needs in future is being devised by the NCSE, in consultation with the Health Service Executive and National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS)

This model will take account of the decision making process and qualification criteria for the selection of children for access to HSE Children Disability Network Teams.

For the purposes of the introduction of the new allocation model from September 2017, the existing 2016/17 school year NCSE ‘Low Incidence’ allocations are being maintained to provide for the complex needs component of schools profiles.

For the next re-profiling of the model, the Complex Needs category will be the existing low incidence allocations for schools, less any leavers included in this category, plus additional allocations for any new complex needs category pupils, over the period of time since the first school profiles were developed, to the point of the next re-profiling of the model. In this context, the requirement for schools to advise school leavers to the NCSE will remain a feature of the revised arrangements.

7.2 Standardised Test Results

The NCSE working group report considered that standardised test data provides a broad and objective basis to establish differences between schools in levels of relative overall pupils educational achievement.
The report recommended that standardised test results should be used in building the educational profile of schools, as they link directly to the educational achievement of pupils in schools.

The use of standardised test scores will ensure that the school’s educational profile includes pupils with low achievement in literacy and numeracy including those pupils whose special educational needs affect their learning achievement levels.

**The use of standardised test data means that the school profile considers not just the number of pupils in the school, but also the learning needs of the pupils in that school, as evidenced by attainment levels in literacy and numeracy.**

The Working Group recommended that for the purposes of devising a school’s educational profile, standardised test result data for Mathematics and for English, and/or Irish, should be used to represent pupil attainment in literacy and numeracy.

In 2014 and 2015 all primary school pupils in 2nd, 4th and 6th class completed tests in English and Maths.1

Schools have been profiled according to test results for pupils achieving at or below STen 4 in national standardised tests in English and Maths.

In developing the school’s educational profile, the highest weighting has been assigned for the percentage of pupils who register a STen score of 1, or who were exempted from the test, with graduated weightings then being given for the percentage of pupils who register a STen score of 2, 3, and 4.

**The number of pupils in the lower standardised test grades indicates the extent of learning needs in the school. The allocation which is being made to the school recognises this.**

The learning needs which are indicated by lower standardised test score may arise for a number of reasons. For example a school may have large numbers of pupils who have special educational needs, pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, or pupils who do not have English as a first language.

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1 Junior or Infant schools who do not have 2nd class pupils have therefore not completed 2nd class standardised tests. For such Junior or Infant schools, the 2nd class standardised test scores from pupils in their associated or feeder school have been used to apply a standardised test value for these schools.
The previous generalised allocation model, based primarily on school size, did not take account of the learning needs of pupils, or of the profile of pupils in the school. It was for this reason that the NCSE recommended that a profiled allocation be made for schools, which included consideration of standardised test scores.

The allocations which are being made to schools for the standardised test score component therefore reflects the actual level of learning needs in each school.

In calculating this element of schools’ educational profile, in order to ensure that schools are not penalised for improving performance in the short term, an aggregate of primary school standardised test results over 2013/14 and 2014/15 has been used for the first phase of the introduction of the new allocation model.

For future re-profiling of the model, updated data will be used to create an aggregate of the school’s learning support needs, which will ensure that an accurate picture of a school’s profile over a period of time is developed and that school’s are also not penalised for improvements or fluctuations in schools performance over a short time.

In order to further ensure that schools are not penalised for improving performance generally, no resources provided to schools under the current model will be removed from the school on the introduction of the new model.

The use of standardised test data means that the school profile considers the learning needs pupils are performing at a level represented in the bottom 16% of the pupil population, as evidenced by national attainment data.

In this context, schools with strong performance on standardised tests should have no concerns on the impact of this on their profiles. In calculating values for this component, no consideration is given to scores above Standard Ten scores 1 to 4. Effectively, values are only accorded to the 16% of pupils who would ordinarily fall within, or are on the margins of, the learning support needs category.

Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools

In many Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools, Irish may be the first language of pupils attending the school. Some such schools also provide additional teaching support for pupil literacy through Irish.
Accordingly, for Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools, the standardised test scores in both Irish and English have been used to calculate the element of the school profile relevant to pupil attainment in literacy.

In Irish language schools the support provided for pupils by schools to assist with pupils literacy development may be conducted in Irish or English, or a combination of both, as considered necessary by the school.

7.3 Social Context: Disadvantage

The NCSE Working Group noted that a school’s social context can contribute strongly to the level of learning needs that pupils have in a school.

The Working Group noted that drawing on ‘Growing Up in Ireland’ data, the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) analysed how the prevalence of special educational needs varies across social class and income groups. They found that the percentage of pupils reported by teachers to have special educational needs was significantly greater for those in schools serving disadvantaged areas.

On the basis of available research, the Working Group concluded that the use of a school’s social context is valid in the development of a school’s educational profile, as the socioeconomic status of pupils is linked to the incidence of certain types of special educational needs.

The profiled allocation for schools therefore contains an allocation to take account of social context. This has been calculated by conducting a social context survey of primary schools in 2014. Future reviews will take account of updated data and will be guided by the best available information sources at the time of the review.

Though recognising that all schools would not be able to have specific detail regarding all of the questions asked in relation to their pupil populations, schools were asked to provide their best possible estimates in relation to the questions in the survey, in order to ensure that as accurate as possible a social context allocation component of any revised allocation model could be developed for each school.
The data which schools were requested to return as part of the survey was non-personal, anonymised data. Schools were not asked to return data in relation to the social circumstances of individual pupils.

7.4 Social Context: Gender

The Working Group report noted that international evidence clearly shows that there is a higher incidence of special educational needs among boys. It states that ‘gender is an important factor in determining the educational profile of a school for the purpose of allocating additional resources to support pupils with special educational needs’.

Gender had previously been taken account of as a feature of the General Allocation Model. Under the GAM, differing allocation ratios applied for boys, girls, mixed, and disadvantaged schools as set out in DES Circular 02/05.

The new allocation model takes account of gender differentials by giving a small weighting for gender based on the number of boys attending each school. The weighting for each school will therefore take account of the gender profile i.e. number of boys attending.

7.5 English Additional Language Support (EAL)

The General Allocation Model for primary schools, since 2012/13, has contained an element of provision for all schools to be able to provide additional teaching support for literacy issues arising from English Additional Language (EAL) needs.

The new allocation model retains and reflects this provision and provides that all schools will have a basic allocation to assist pupils who have learning and literacy difficulties, including those arising from English Additional Language (EAL) needs.

The standardised test scores on which part of the profile is based will reflect where pupils have literacy problems. The social context survey for primary schools also took some account of EAL needs in schools.

The profiled allocation for schools therefore takes account of EAL needs in schools.
7.6 Additional Allocations for Schools with High Concentrations of Pupils that require Language Support (EAL)

Where schools can demonstrate that they have high concentrations of pupils requiring EAL they can continue to apply for Additional Allocations for Schools with High Concentrations of Pupils that require Language Support (EAL) in accordance with the procedures set out in the primary school staffing schedule for the 2017/18 school year.

8. Total Profiled Allocation

The total profiled allocation which is being made to each school is designed to ensure that all schools have a set level of special education teaching support in order to provide additional teaching support for all pupils in their school, including those who may enrol in future, who have identified needs.

Pupils under the new allocation model will be identified by schools for additional teaching support in accordance with the Continuum of Support Guidelines, and the Guidelines which accompany this Circular. Teachers and School Principals will use their professional judgement in applying the principles and practices set out in the Continuum of Support Guidelines: https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/neps_special_needs_guidelines.pdf

The inclusion of a baseline allocation as part of the overall profiled allocation is also designed to ensure that schools can continue to enrol pupils who have additional learning needs.

Details of how the total profile allocation is applied for the total primary school sector is detailed in Appendix 1.

9. Enrolment of Pupils with Special Educational Needs

The significant additional resources which have been provided to assist the introduction of this new model have ensured that all schools, whose school profiles indicated significant additional needs for September 2017, will receive additional allocations.
Schools, who would have been due to receive reduced allocations, based on their school profiles, have had these losses protected to ensure that they receive allocations equivalent to their 2016/17 special educational needs allocations. These additional allocations are being provided on the basis that no child will be refused enrolment on the grounds that they do not have sufficient teaching resources to meet that child’s needs.

In circumstances where schools refuse to enrol children, on the basis of their special educational teaching needs, and notwithstanding any other legislative provisions currently in place, or forthcoming, the Department of Education and Skills reserves the right to review the allocations of Special Educational Needs Teaching Support Allocations made to schools who do not enrol such pupils.

10. Medical and Professional Assessments

Medical and other professional assessments should, where available, continue to be used to help explain, and provide a better understanding of a child’s needs, the nature of difficulties, and to inform relevant interventions. Such assessment, or diagnosis of a particular condition will no longer be necessary for pupils to access educational teaching resources in schools, nor will there be a requirement for schools to submit assessments annually in order to apply for additional teaching resources.

This will create a very significant administrative saving for schools who will no longer have to source assessments or make applications annually to the NCSE in order to ensure the provision of additional teaching supports in their school.

It will end delays in allocations. Pupils will no longer experience delays in receiving reports which could, in the past, deny a child access to necessary learning supports.

Schools will maintain their full school profiles, pending review of the profiles, regardless of whether some pupils with assessments of special educational needs either leave or enter the school over the period for which the profiled allocation remains in place.

It is expected that the number of leavers in each school, who had previously been in receipt of learning support or resource teaching support, will be broadly balanced by any new entrants that have enrolled over the same period.
School profiles will remain constant over this period recognising normal pupil movement over the life of the model.

Profiles will not be updated over the course of the initial two years of the model to take account of new enrolments or the newly diagnosed needs of pupils attending the school, other than as noted in Section 11 in relation to appeals.

Any differentials in the school profile will be accounted for at the next review of school profiles.

The school may allocate additional teaching support to pupils where it has identified learning needs using school based assessment, the NEPS Continuum of Support and the Guidelines provided to schools. Schools can also draw on professional reports where available.

Under the new model, a child should receive additional teaching support based on their identified learning needs, rather than primarily on diagnosis of disability.

11. Appeal Process

The NCSE will be notifying schools of the allocations in March 2017 by letter and website publication. Details of an appeal process will be set out as part of this notification.

12. Identification of Pupils for Support

The Guidelines which accompany this circular set out the manner in which schools should identify pupils for additional teaching support in schools.

In summary, in identifying pupils for support, schools should take into account the following:

- Standardised tests can be used to screen and identify pupils’ performance in reading and mathematics. Those pupils performing below the 10th percentile should be prioritised for support in literacy and numeracy.
• Pupils who were previously in receipt of supplementary teaching from a resource or learning support teacher and who continue to experience significant learning difficulties.

• Pupils who are identified as having significant needs through a process of ongoing assessment and intervention as set out in the Continuum of Support Process (DES, 2010). This will be evidenced through school-based assessment of attainment, and behavioural, social and emotional functioning and ongoing monitoring of learning outcomes. Schools should also take into account needs set out in professional reports, where available.

• Pupils with mild or transient educational needs including those associated with speech and language difficulties, social or emotional problems, or co-ordination or attention control difficulties. Pupils who have specific learning disabilities.

• Pupils with significant Special Educational Needs. For example, pupils with significant learning, behavioural, emotional, physical and sensory needs. These pupils need additional teaching support because they require highly individualised and differentiated learning programmes that are tailored to their needs.

• Schools should also carefully consider the needs of other pupils who may present with a range of learning whose interaction may present a significant barrier to the pupils’ learning and ability to access the curriculum.

• Pupils who have additional literacy or language learning needs including those pupils who need additional English Additional language Support.

The intensity of additional support that is provided for pupils with low achievement and pupils with special educational needs should be based on their needs and should be provided differentially through the continuum of support process.

13. The Role of the Classroom Teacher

Section 22 (1) of the Education Act 1998 states the primacy of the teacher in the education and personal development of pupils in schools. The classroom teacher is responsible for educating all pupils in his/her
class, including any pupil with a special educational need. The class teacher has primary responsibility for the progress and care of all pupils in his/her classroom, including pupils with special educational needs.

It is the responsibility of the classroom teacher to ensure that each pupil is taught in a stimulating and supportive classroom environment where all pupils feel equal and valued.

In line with Continuum of Support Guidelines, the class teacher may gather information through formal and informal means, with a view to informing interventions. The classroom teacher also has a central role in identifying and responding to pupils with additional needs including differentiating the curriculum as appropriate. These responses will be informed and assisted by collaboration with colleagues, parents/guardians and others such as the school’s NEPS psychologist and the local Special Educational Needs Organiser.

The classroom teacher will also make specific accommodations for a pupil within the class as a result of concerns about a pupil’s progress, application, communication, behaviour or interaction with peers and the development of a programme of differentiated instruction for that pupil.

14. Additional Teaching Support

Many children require additional teaching support in schools. In such circumstances, the classroom teacher will be supported by Special Educational Needs Teachers, who will have access to additional training in the area of special education, and who will work closely with the class teacher to provide additional teaching support for children with special educational needs.

The classroom teacher, in consultation with the Special Education Teacher as required, will consider ways in which the curriculum can be differentiated or adapted to suit the needs of individual pupils. This may also involve identifying the most appropriate teaching strategies and programmes to meet the child’s needs, and deciding which additional teaching supports are required. Parents should normally be consulted as part of this process.
15. Type of Teaching provided

Additional Teaching support can be provided in a variety of ways. The special education teacher might work in the classroom with the class teacher or withdraw pupils in small groups and/or individually for a period of time (depending upon the nature of pupils needs) for intensive teaching of key skills.

The range of teaching supports should include team-teaching, small group teaching and, where necessary, individualised teaching to address specific learning needs.

Individualised learning needs can be addressed in a variety of ways and should not be solely equated with withdrawal from class for one-to-one or group tuition. Configurations of team-teaching have been shown to provide an appropriate model for engaging with individual needs in the collective setting of the classroom. As necessary, this can be combined with withdrawal for intensive teaching of specific skills, based on level of need.

The provision of support for small groups of pupils, or use of in class support teaching for a number of pupils, as opposed to primarily one to one teaching, also means that qualifying pupils will often be able to receive more support than they otherwise would have done.

16. Single Allocation

The new Special Educational Post is a combined post which allows schools to provide for all of their special education teaching needs from within this single allocation.

The distinction between what were previously Learning Support Posts, or Learning Support/Resource Teaching/EAL posts under GAM, and NCSE allocated Resource Teaching Posts will no longer apply from September 2017.

Schools will now have a combined, single special educational needs teaching allocation.

This will reduce the amount of inter school post sharing, or clustering. It will further reduce the administrative burden on schools and the amount of travelling time between schools.
As such, the stipulation contained in DES Circular 07/2012 (and subsequent annual staffing arrangement Circulars) that schools are not permitted to combine GAM/EAL and NCSE approved resource hours together into full-time posts, will no longer apply.

17. Rounding

For schools who are receiving an additional allocation under the new allocation process, allocations are rounded to units of 2.5 hours, in order to simplify allocations for schools.

Schools who are not receiving additional allocations will maintain their existing 2016/17 allocations.

18. Status of Posts

All full-time Special Education Teaching (S.E.T.) posts, both full-time in one school and base posts for S.E.T. clusters are permanent posts.

Part-time hours remaining in a school that are not clustered can only be filled in a temporary capacity.

19. Registration Requirements for Special Education Teaching Posts

As set out in Section 16 above, under the New Allocation Model, there will no longer be a distinction between Learning Support and Resourcing Teaching Posts. These provisions are being merged into a single Special Education Teacher post.

In recognition that under the previous allocation model differing qualification criteria existed, for the introduction of the new allocation model, and to ensure continuity of provision, fully registered teachers or teachers previously probated in a restricted setting may be appointed to the post of Special Education Teachers.

Schools should make all effort to ensure that where possible fully registered teachers or teachers previously probated in a restricted setting are appointed. Such teachers may hold Teaching
Council registration under Route 1 Primary (formerly Regulation 2 Primary) or Route 4 Other (formerly Regulation 3 Montessori & Other Categories).

It is important to ensure that pupils with the greatest needs are supported by teachers who have the relevant expertise, and who can provide continuity of support. Therefore, if it is not possible to fill the post of Special Education Teacher with a fully registered teacher, or a teacher previously probated in a restricted setting, teachers with outstanding conditions, may be appointed where they are deemed to be the most appropriately qualified. In these circumstances, the acquired professional development and expertise of teachers, including where teachers have attained recognised qualifications in special education, should be taken into account.

20. Filling of Posts

Special Education Teaching posts should be filled in accordance with the published staffing and redeployment arrangements which will be set out in the Primary School Staffing Schedule for the 2017/18 school year.

21. Deployment of Teachers within the School

In addition to the qualification requirements noted in Section 19 above, the acquired professional development and expertise of teachers, including where teachers have attained recognised qualifications in special education, should be taken into account by the principal when allocating teaching responsibilities, in order to ensure that pupils with the greatest needs are supported by teachers who have the relevant expertise, and who can provide continuity of support.

22. Utilisation of additional teaching resources for pupils with special educational needs

The effective inclusion of pupils with special educational needs requires a whole-school approach which enables schools to meet the diverse needs of their pupil population in an efficient and timely manner.

Resources to support pupils should be deployed in accordance with the Guidelines being provided to accompany this Circular.
Schools should ensure that the additional Special Educational Needs Teaching supports are used in their entirety to support pupils identified with special educational needs, learning support needs, and additional literacy needs such as English Additional Language Support.

The additional Teaching Resources which are being provided under this model cannot be used for mainstream class teaching, or to reduce the pupil teacher ratio in mainstream classes, or to provide additional subjects for pupils who do not have special educational needs.

In cases where there is misuse of Special Educational Needs Teaching resources and where these resources are being used for purposes other than intended, as set out in this Circular, the Department reserves the right to review the allocations of Special Educational Needs Teaching Supports which have been made to those schools.

23. Coordination Activities

The allocation includes provision for the conducting of planning and co-ordination activities required to ensure the most effective and optimal use of the special educational needs teaching hours provided to schools, for children. The effective use of resources will be dependent upon effective timetabling practices that ensures continuity and avoids undue fragmentation of provision.

The extent of co-ordination time required to be used by schools will vary depending on school size, the number of pupils requiring additional teaching support, and the number of teachers proving this support. Co-ordination time, should however, be kept to a minimum in order to ensure that the most teaching time that can be provided for pupils can be given to those pupils.

24. Educational Planning

Educational planning is an essential element of a whole-school approach to meeting pupils’ needs. Educational plans should be differentiated in line with a pupils’ needs. A pupils support plan should include clear, measurable learning targets, and specify the resources and interventions that will be used to address student needs in line with the Continuum of Support process. Individualised support plans for pupils should be developed through a collaborative process involving relevant teachers, parents/guardians, the pupils themselves and outside professionals, as necessary. The individualised planning process should
include regular reviews of learning targets as part of an ongoing cycle of assessment, target setting, intervention and review.

Guidelines for schools on educational planning and monitoring of outcomes and the manner in which they should conduct educational planning, through the Student Support File, are contained in the Guidelines for primary Schools: Supporting Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools.

25. Supports for Schools

Additional support and guidance will be available for school management and staff from Department agencies and services such as the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), and the DES Inspectorate.

If you have any queries with regards to this Circular please contact special_education@education.gov.ie

This circular can be accessed on the Department’s website www.education.ie

Jim Mulkerrins
Principal Officer
Special Education Unit

7th March, 2017
Appendix 1: Total Profile Allocation

Though the individual allocations will vary for each particular school, based on the number of pupils in each school qualifying within each category for whom a profiled allocation is being made, the allocation of the total existing resources for redistribution, based on a profiled allocation model, for primary schools, will be as follows:

### Baseline

The Baseline allocation of each school profile is made up of 20% of the total number of Resource/Learning Support posts allocated to schools for the 2016/17 school year, redistributed equally between all schools, based on each school’s enrolment numbers for the 2015/16 school year, which is the most complete recent enrolment data available.

### Complex Needs

Maintaining the existing 2016/17 Low Incidence allocations for primary schools, in order to create the Complex Needs component for the introduction of the new allocation model from September 2017, means that approximately 50% of the total number of Resource/Learning Support posts
allocated to primary schools for the 2016/17 school year are being used for the Complex Needs profile component.

**Standardised Test Scores**

The portion of the overall resources being provided for Standardised test results under the school profile equates to approximately 23% of the total allocation for primary schools.

**Disadvantage**

Approximately 3.5% of the total profiled allocation for primary schools is being allocated to provide some part of the allocation for disadvantage. This will vary between schools, depending on the social context of each school.

**Gender**

Approximately 3.5% of the total profiled allocation for primary schools will is being allocated to provide some part of the allocation for gender.

The actual allocation distribution will vary between schools, depending on the number of pupils within each category of the profile.
Circular No 0014/2017

Circular to the Management Authorities of all Post Primary Schools: Secondary, Community and Comprehensive Schools and the Chief Executive Officers of the Education and Training Boards

Special Education Teaching Allocation

1. Purpose

The purpose of this Circular is to advise schools of the revised allocation process for Special Education Teachers to mainstream post primary schools from the 2017/18 school year.

This revised allocation process will replace the Learning Support and English as Additional Language Support (LS/EAL) scheme, whereby a general allocation of resources had previously been allocated to post primary schools annually.

It will also replace the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocation process which provided additional resource teaching supports to schools, to support students who had been assessed as having Low Incidence disabilities, in accordance with DES Circular 70/2014 [https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0070_2014.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0070_2014.pdf)

It will also replace the allocation process for post primary schools to support students with High Incidence special educational needs, as set out in DES Circular 0010/2012 [https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Archived-Circulars/cl0010_2012.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Archived-Circulars/cl0010_2012.pdf)

The new Special Education Teaching allocation will provide a single unified allocation for special educational teaching needs to each school, based on that school’s educational profile.
This single allocation is being made to allow schools to provide special education teaching support for all students who require such support in their schools.

Schools will deploy resources based on each students’ individual learning needs.

The manner in which the profiled allocations have been developed for each school is set out in Sections 6 and 7 of this Circular.

The new allocation model will ensure that schools will have greater certainty as to the resources that will be available to them to provide special education teaching to support the inclusion of students with special educational needs, on an ongoing basis, which will allow schools to better plan and timetable for this provision. The earlier allocation process will also allow schools to plan in advance of the school year.

The new model will provide a greater level of autonomy for schools in how to manage and deploy special education teaching support within their school, based on the individual learning needs of students, as opposed to being based primarily on a diagnosis of disability.

In order to support schools in how they should identify and provide for the learning needs of students, this Circular is being accompanied by Guidelines for Schools on the organisation, deployment and use of special education teachers to address the need of students with special educational needs.

The Guidelines for Post Primary Schools: Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools has been developed by the National Educational Psychological Services, the DES Inspectorate and Special Education Section.

2. Support for the Introduction of the New Allocation Model

Significant additional resources are being made available to provide extra Special Education Teaching posts for allocation to schools from September 2017, in order to support the introduction of this model.

These additional resources will assist schools to transition from the existing allocation system that has been in place in recent years, to the new profiled allocation model, with minimal disruption.
The additional provision which is being made to support the new model will ensure that no school will receive an allocation of special education teaching resources, arising from the introduction of the new allocation model, which is less than the combined allocation the school received under their LS/EAL and NCSE allocations for the 2016/17 school year (inclusive of any allocation for High Incidence Special Educational needs).

These resources will ensure that all schools can continue to meet the special educational and learning support needs of all children in their school.

Schools which are due to receive increased allocations from September 2017, under the revised model, which is based on their school profiles, will receive additional allocations from September 2017 and retain these allocations for the course of the model, until the next re profiling takes place.

Schools which would have nominally been due to receive reduced allocations from September 2017, under the revised model, based on their school profiles, will maintain their existing 2016/17 school year allocations and retain these allocations until the next profiling takes place.

The additional resources being provided to support this model means that no school will lose special educational teaching resources, on the introduction of this model, while extra resources will be placed in schools where the profile indicates that needs are greatest.

Any future adjustments to the allocations for schools will take place on a graduated basis, which will take account of changes to school enrolments, and the student population, including the number of students in the complex needs category, since the initial allocations were developed.

3. Revision of Profiles

In recommending the introduction of a new model for allocating special education teachers to schools the NCSE Working Group Report (2014) recommended that the additional teaching supports will be left in place initially for a two year period.
The allocations which are being made will therefore initially remain in place for a minimum of two years, following which, revised profiled allocations will be due to be made to schools from September 2019.

4. Background

The current system for allocating additional teaching resources to schools, based on valid applications for additional teaching support for students with special educational needs, in mainstream primary schools, was originally implemented in 1999 (Circular 08/99).

This system allocated varying levels of resource teaching hours to schools to support individual students with assessed special educational needs. The scheme was reviewed and revised in 2002 and 2003 through Circulars 08/02 and 24/03. Under the terms of these circulars, students with assessed learning disabilities in ordinary classes in mainstream primary schools were allocated resource teaching support in accordance with the level of support applicable for that category of disability.

The resource teaching allocation processes set out in these Circulars were also applied to post primary schools though specific Circulars were not issued to post primary schools until the issuing of DES Circulars 10/2012 and 70/2014.


Circular 70/2014 set out details of the resource allocation process for post primary schools and provided guidance to mainstream post-primary schools on the deployment and organisation of teaching resources for students who need additional teaching support https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0070_2014.pdf

From the 2012/13 school year onwards, the Learning Support Allocation for Post Primary schools was expanded to also include a general provision for English as an Additional Language (EAL) Support as set out in the annual staffing schedules for post primary schools from 2012/13 onwards, the most recent of which was 01/2016 (Community and Comprehensive) 02/2016 (Education Training Boards) and 03/2016 (Secondary). Schools with high concentrations of students requiring EAL support also received additional teaching allocations to make provision for such concentrated needs and this provision will remain in place.
The new allocation model will provide allocations based on the profiled needs of each school, which will replace the existing system of a LS/EAL allocation for post primary schools along with set levels of high incidence support allocations and NCSE allocated Low Incidence allocations, where relevant.

This Circular therefore replaces DES Circular 70/2014 and Circular 010/2012 and the provisions contained in DES Circular 01/02/03 2016, in relation to Learning Support allocations.

This Circular also replaces the provisions set out in Circulars 08/99, 08/02, 24/3 and 02/05.

5. National Council for Special Education Policy Advice

The National Council for Special Education has a statutory function, under the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004, to provide the Minister for Education and Skills with policy advice in relation to the education of children and others with disabilities or special educational needs.


In particular, the NCSE reported that:

- The existing allocation system was inequitable, as some children could experience delays in accessing support because of delays in accessing assessments which are required for the allocation of Resource Teaching hours.

- The system of general allocation, which is used to allocate Learning Support teachers, is inequitable as it takes little account of the differing needs of different schools, as allocations are made on the basis of the number of mainstream teachers in each school.

- That there is a real risk that children are being diagnosed as having a special educational need for resource allocation purposes rather than such a diagnosis being required for clinical reasons.
That there is a spectrum of ability and disability within every category of special educational need. The current system allocates the same level of support for students within certain categories of special educational needs even though one student may have a greater need for support than another, with the same disability.


This report recommended that the current Special Needs Teacher allocation model should be replaced by a new model to allocate supports on the basis of the profiled educational needs of schools.

It proposed that the allocation of additional teaching supports to schools be, in future, based on a schools educational profile, comprised of two components:

- Baseline component provided to every mainstream school to support inclusion, assistance with learning difficulties and early intervention, and

- A school educational profile component, which takes into account:
  - The number of students with complex needs enrolled to the school.
  - The learning support needs of students as evidenced by standardised test results.
  - The social context of the school including disadvantage and gender.

The combination of a baseline allocation based on school enrolments and a profiled allocation will give a fairer allocation for each school which recognises that all schools need an allocation for special needs support, but which provides a graduated allocation which takes into account the level of need, whether current or predicted, and student mixture in each school.

The allocations, which are being provided for schools from September 2017, are based on the profiled allocations for each school, which are calculated as follows:
6. Baseline component provided to mainstream post primary school to support inclusion, assistance with learning difficulties, and early intervention

The Working Group recommended that a baseline allocation of teaching resources to all mainstream schools, allocated in line with overall enrolment numbers, should be a core component of the new model.

This baseline allocation will ensure that all schools have a minimum allocation of teaching resources to support inclusion, assistance with learning difficulties and early intervention. The baseline component will support schools in having whole school policies and practices in place to minimise the emergence of low achievement and learning difficulties. The baseline is provided in addition to the resources calculated under the other elements used in establishing the school’s educational profile.

The baseline allocation will also ensure that schools can continue to enrol and support students with additional needs over the course of time that the profile remains in place and pending any review of the schools profile.

The Baseline allocation of each school profile is made up of 20% of the total number of Resource/Learning Support posts in the system allocated to schools for the 2016/17 school year, redistributed on an equal basis, proportionately, between all schools, based on each school’s enrolment numbers for the 2015/16 school year, which is the most complete recent enrolment data available.

It should be noted that the baseline allocation under the new model cannot be compared to the Learning Support or general allocations for High Incidence disabilities received under the old system. This is an entirely new and different model, and not simply an adjustment of the old model. For a complete overview of their additional teaching allocation under the new model, schools must consider their baseline allocation, alongside the allocation they receive under the educational profile component, which gives them their total allocation.

The baseline also does not represent 20% of your individual schools allocation from last year, but 20% of the total Learning Support and Resource Teaching allocations, redistributed on an equal basis, proportionately, between schools, according to school enrolment numbers.
7. School Educational Profile.

7.1 The number of students with complex needs enrolled to the school.

For the introduction of the new allocation model, from September 2017, the NCSE ‘Low Incidence’ allocations which had been made for each school during the preceding 2016/17 school year, have been used to establish the complex needs component of the new model for each school.

These allocations include the additional allocations for Resource Teaching support which were made to schools in 2015 and 2016 to support students with Down syndrome who were in the mild general learning difficulty range and not previously included in the Low Incidence allocations.

This recognises the existing distribution of students who were recognised as having significant special educational needs, as defined by the previous Low Incidence categorisation, across the school system.

This means that on the introduction of the new allocation model and until allocations are reviewed, no school will receive an allocation, for the support of students with complex needs, which is less than the allocation they had received to support students with Low Incidence special educational needs during the 2016/17 school year.

This also means that no allocation for students made by the NCSE will be removed from schools as long as that student remains in the school.

Whereas schools will have greater discretion as to how they can distribute resources under the new model, based on the individual needs of students, no reduction in allocations have been made to schools in respect of any students who were previously in receipt of a Low Incidence special needs allocation in that school.

A model for the identification of students with complex needs in future is being devised by the NCSE, in consultation with the Health Service Executive and National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS) and further guidance will issue to post primary schools in this regard.

For the purposes of the introduction of the new allocation model from September 2017, the existing 2016/17 school year NCSE ‘Low Incidence’ allocations are being maintained to provide for the complex needs component of schools profiles.
For the next re-profiling of the model, the Complex Needs category will be the existing complex needs (low incidence) allocation for schools, less any leavers included in this category, plus additional allocations for any new complex needs category students, over the period of time since the first school profiles were developed, to the point of the next re-profiling of the model. In this context, the requirement for schools to advise school leavers to the NCSE will remain a feature of the revised arrangements.

7.2 Standardised Test Results

The NCSE working group report considered that standardised test data provides a broad and objective basis to establish differences between schools in levels of relative overall student educational achievement.

The report recommended that standardised test results should be used in building the educational profile of schools, as they link directly to the educational achievement of students in schools.

The use of standardised test scores will ensure that the school’s educational profile includes students with low achievement in literacy and numeracy, including those students whose special educational needs affects their learning achievement levels.  

**The use of standardised test data means that the school profile considers not just the number of students in the school, but also the learning needs of the students in that school, as evidenced by attainment levels in literacy and numeracy.**

The Working Group recommended that for the purposes of devising a school’s educational profile, standardised test result data for Mathematics and for English, and/or Irish, should be used to represent student attainment in literacy and numeracy.

As standardised test data is not yet available for post primary schools Junior Certificate examination results in English and Mathematics for 2013 and 2014 and 2015 are being used. The examination result data in English and Mathematics represent the literacy and numeracy achievement scores and have been applied in a graduated manner by the Educational Research Centre to create a value for each school.
The number of students in the lower performing grades indicates the extent of learning support needs in the school.

The allocation which is being made to the school recognises this.

The learning needs which are indicated by lower test scores may arise for a number of reasons. For example, schools may have large numbers of students with special educational needs, students from disadvantaged backgrounds, or students who do not have English as a first language.

The previous Learning Support allocation model, which was based primarily on school size, did not take account of the learning needs of students, or of the profile of students in the school. It was for this reason that the NCSE recommended that a profiled allocation be made for schools, which included consideration of standardised test scores.

The allocations which are being made to schools for the standardised test score component therefore reflects the actual level of learning needs in each school.

In calculating this element of schools’ educational profile, in order to ensure that schools are not penalised for improving performance in the short term, an aggregate of post primary school Junior Certificate test results over 2013, 2014, and 2015, have been used for the first phase of the introduction of the new allocation model.

For future re-profiling of the model, updated data will be used to create an aggregate of the schools learning support needs, which will ensure that an accurate picture of a school’s profile over a period of time is developed and that schools are not penalised for improvements or fluctuations in schools performance over a short time.

7.3 Social Context: Disadvantage

The NCSE Working Group noted that a school’s social context can contribute strongly to the level of learning support needs that students have in a school.

The Working Group noted that drawing on ‘Growing Up in Ireland’ data, the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) analysed how the prevalence of special educational needs varies across social
class and income groups. They found that the percentage of students reported by teachers to have special educational needs was significantly greater in schools serving disadvantaged areas.

On the basis of available research, the Working Group concluded that the use of a school’s social context is valid in the development of a school’s educational profile, as the socioeconomic status of students is linked to the incidence of certain types of special educational needs.

The profiled allocation for schools therefore contains an allocation to take account of social context. This has been calculated by use of the Examination Fee Waiver data for post primary schools. Future reviews will take account of updated data and will be guided by the best available information sources at the time of the review.

7.4 Social Context: Gender

The Working Group report noted that international evidence clearly shows that there is a higher incidence of special educational needs among boys. It states that ‘gender is an important factor in determining the educational profile of a school for the purpose of allocating additional resources to support students with special educational needs.

The new allocation model takes account of gender differentials by giving a small weighting for gender based on the number of boys attending each school. The weighting for each school will therefore take account of the gender profile of each school i.e. number of boys attending.

7.5 English Additional Language Support (EAL)

The Learning Support Allocation for post primary schools, since 2012/13, has contained an element of provision for all schools to be able to provide additional teaching support for literacy issues arising from English Additional Language (EAL) needs.

The new allocation model retains and reflects this provision and provides that all schools will have a basic allocation to assist students who have learning and literacy difficulties, including those arising from English Additional Language (EAL) needs.
The standardised test scores on which part of the profile is based will reflect where students have literacy problems. The profiled allocation for schools therefore takes account of EAL needs in schools.

7.6 Additional Allocations for Schools with High Concentrations of Students that require Language Support (EAL)

Where schools can demonstrate that they have high concentrations of students requiring EAL they can continue to apply for Additional Allocations for Schools with High Concentrations of students that require Language Support (EAL) in accordance with the procedures set out in the post primary staffing circulars for the 2017/18 school year.

7.7 Fee Paying Post Primary Schools

Under the existing allocation scheme, only schools who are recognised schools in the free education scheme or block grant scheme received additional allocations of Learning Support. Such schools also received allocations from the NCSE resource allocation process.

Schools who are not in the free education scheme or block grant scheme received allocations from the NCSE resource allocation process only.

On the introduction of the new allocation model, fee paying schools will retain their existing allocations as their profiled model allocations.

For schools in the free education scheme or block grant scheme this will be NCSE allocations and Learning Support allocations.

For schools who are not in the free education scheme or block grant scheme schools, this will be their NCSE resource allocations.

The existing allocations will be used to create a set level of resource allocation for such schools over the course of the profiled model. In a normal year the number of new pupils enrolling with complex needs should broadly balance the number of pupils leaving who had previously been in the low incidence resource teaching category. In circumstances where fee paying schools can demonstrate that the number
of pupils they have enrolled with complex needs requiring highly individualised and differentiated learning programmes that are significantly different to those of their peers, is significantly greater than the number of leavers with low incidence disabilities, such schools may make contact with the NCSE.

8. Total Profiled Allocation

The total profiled allocation which is being made to each school is designed to ensure that all schools have a set level of special education teaching support in order to provide additional teaching support for all students in their school, including those who may enrol in future, who have identified needs.

Students under the new allocation model will be identified by schools for additional teaching support in accordance with the Continuum of Support Guidelines, and the Guidelines which accompany this Circular. Teachers and School Principals will use their professional judgement in applying the principles and practices set out in the Continuum of Support Guidelines:

The inclusion of a baseline allocation as part of the overall profiled allocation is also designed to ensure that schools can continue to enrol students who have additional learning needs.

Details of how the total profile allocation is applied for all post primary schools is detailed in Appendix 1.

9. Enrolment of Students with Special Educational Needs

The significant additional resources which have been provided to assist the introduction of this new model has ensured that all schools, whose school profiles indicated significant additional needs for September 2017, have received additional allocations.

Schools who would have been due to receive reduced allocations, based on their school profiles, have had these losses protected to ensure that they receive allocations equivalent to their 2016/17 special educational needs allocations. These additional allocations are being provided on the basis that no child
will be refused enrolment on the grounds that they do not have sufficient teaching resources to meet that child’s needs.

In circumstances where schools refuse to enrol children, on the basis of their special educational teaching needs, and notwithstanding any other legislative provisions currently in place, or forthcoming, the Department of Education and Skills reserves the right to review the allocations of Special Educational Needs Teaching Support Allocations made to schools who do not enrol such students.

10. Medical and Professional Assessments

Medical and other professional assessments should, where available, continue to be used to help explain, and provide a better understanding of a student’s needs, the nature of his/her difficulties, and to inform relevant interventions. However, such assessment, or diagnosis of a particular condition will no longer be necessary for students to access additional educational teaching resources in schools, nor will there be a requirement for schools to submit assessments annually in order to apply for additional teaching resources.

This will create a very significant administrative saving for schools who will no longer have to source assessments or make applications annually to the NCSE in order to ensure the provision of additional teaching supports in their school.

It will end delays in allocations. Students will no longer experience delays in receiving reports which could, in the past, deny a child access to necessary learning supports.

Schools will maintain their full school profiles, pending review of the profiles, regardless of whether some students who with assessments of special educational needs either leave or enter the school over the period for which the profiled allocation remains in place.

It is expected that the number of leavers in each school, who had previously been in receipt of learning support or resource teaching support, will be broadly balanced by any new entrants that have enrolled over the same period.

School profiles will remain constant over this period recognising normal student movement over the life of the model.
Profiles will not be updated over the initial two years of the model to take account of new enrolments or the newly diagnosed needs of students attending the school, other than in circumstances set out in Section 11 in relation to appeals.

Any differentials in the school profile will be accounted for at the next review of school profiles.

The school may allocate additional teaching support to students who have identified needs for teaching and learning using school based assessment, the NEPS Continuum of Support and the Guidelines provided to schools. Schools can also draw on professional reports where available.

Under the new model, a student should receive additional teaching support based on their identified learning needs, rather than primarily on diagnosis of disability.

11. Appeal Process

The NCSE will be notifying schools of the allocation in March 2017 by letter and website publication. Details of an appeal process will be set out as part of this notification.

12. Identification of Students for Support

The Guidelines which accompany this circular set out the manner in which schools should identify students for additional teaching support in schools.

In summary, in identifying students for support, schools should take into account the following:

- Standardised tests can be used to screen and identify students’ performance in reading and mathematics. Those students performing below the 10th percentile should be prioritised for support in literacy and numeracy.

- Students who were previously in receipt of supplementary teaching from a resource or learning support teacher and who continue to experience significant learning difficulties.
• Students who are identified as having significant needs through a process of ongoing assessment and intervention as set out in the Continuum of Support Process (DES, 2010). This will be evidenced through school-based assessment of attainment, and behavioural, social and emotional functioning and ongoing monitoring of learning outcomes. Schools should also take into account needs set out in professional reports, where available.

• Students with mild or transient educational needs including those associated with speech and language difficulties, social or emotional problems, or co-ordination or attention control difficulties. students who have specific learning disabilities.

• Students with significant Special Educational Needs. For example, students with significant learning, behavioural, emotional, physical and sensory needs. These students need additional teaching support because they require highly individualised and differentiated learning programmes that are tailored to their needs.

• Schools should also carefully consider the needs of other students who may present with a range of learning whose interaction may present a significant barrier to the students’ learning and ability to access the curriculum.

• Students who have additional literacy or language learning needs including those students who need additional English Additional language Support.

• In Irish language schools the support provided for pupils by schools to assist with pupils literacy development may be conducted in Irish or English, or a combination of both, as considered necessary by the school.

The intensity of additional support that is provided for students with low achievement and students with special educational needs should be based on their needs and should be provided differentially through the continuum of support process.

13. The Role of the Classroom Teacher

Section 22 (1) of the Education Act 1998 states the primacy of the teacher in the education and personal development of students in schools. The classroom teacher is responsible for educating all students in
his/her class, including any student with a special educational need. The class teacher has primary responsibility for the progress and care of all students in his/her classroom, including students with special educational needs.

It is the responsibility of the classroom teacher to ensure that each student is taught in a stimulating and supportive classroom environment where all students feel equal and valued.

In line with Continuum of Support Guidelines, the class teacher may gather information through formal and informal means, with a view to informing interventions. The classroom teacher also has a central role in identifying and responding to students with additional needs, including differentiating the curriculum as appropriate. These responses will be informed and assisted by collaboration with colleagues, parents/guardians and others such as the school’s NEPS psychologist, and the local Special Educational Needs Organiser.

The classroom teacher will also make specific accommodations for students within the class as a result of concerns about a student’s progress, application, communication, behaviour or interaction with peers and the development of a programme of differentiated instruction for that student.

14. Additional Teaching Support

Many children require additional teaching support in schools. In such circumstances, the classroom teacher will be supported by Special Education Teachers, who will have access to additional training in the area of special education, and who will work closely with the class teacher to provide additional teaching support for children with special educational needs.

The classroom teacher, in consultation with the Special Educational Needs Teacher as required, will consider ways in which the curriculum can be differentiated or adapted to suit the needs of individual students. This may also involve identifying the most appropriate teaching strategies and programmes to meet the students needs, and whether additional teaching supports are required. Parents should normally be consulted as part of this process.
15. Type of Teaching provided

Additional Teaching support can be provided in a variety of ways. The special educational needs teacher might work in the classroom with the class teacher or withdraw students in small groups and/or individually for a period of time (depending upon the nature of students needs) for intensive teaching of key skills.

The range of teaching supports should include team-teaching, small group teaching and, where necessary, individualised teaching to address specific learning needs.

Individualised learning needs can be addressed in a variety of ways and should not be solely equated with withdrawal from class for one-to-one or group tuition. Configurations of team-teaching have been shown to provide an appropriate model for engaging with individual needs in the collective setting of the classroom. As necessary, this can be combined with withdrawal for intensive teaching of specific skills, based on level of need.

The provision of support for small groups of students, or use of in class support teaching for a number of students, as opposed to primarily one to one teaching, also means that qualifying students will often be able to receive more support than they otherwise would have done.

16. Single Allocation

The new Special Education Teaching Post is a combined post which allows schools to provide for all of their additional special educational needs teaching support from within this single allocation.

The distinction between what were previously Learning Support Posts and NCSE Special Needs Resource Teaching Allocations will no longer apply from September 2017.

Schools will now have a combined, single special educational needs teaching allocation and schools can now combine these roles.
17. Rounding

For schools who are receiving an additional allocation under the new allocation process, allocations are rounded to units of 2.5 hours, in order to simplify allocations for schools.

Schools who are not receiving additional allocations will maintain their existing 2016/17 allocations.

18. Allocation of Special Education Teachers

Special Education Teaching Posts will appear as an allocation on the staffing schedules in accordance with the allocation rules for each individual sector.

19. Qualifications Required for Special Education Support Posts

The following teachers can be appointed:

Fully recognised and registered post primary teachers.

20. Filling of Posts

Special Education Teaching posts should be filled in accordance with the published staffing and redeployment arrangements which will be set out in the Post Primary School Staffing Circulars for the 2017/18 school year.

21. Deployment of Teachers within the School

In addition to the qualification requirements noted in Section 19 above, the acquired professional development and expertise of teachers should be taken into account by the principal when allocating
teaching responsibilities, in order to ensure that students with the greatest needs are supported by teachers who have the relevant expertise, and who can provide continuity of support.

Schools should establish and maintain a core team of teachers for special educational needs. Members of this team should have the necessary experience and ongoing access to professional development to support the diverse needs of students with special educational needs. A member of the special educational needs team might be assigned the responsibility for planning for the provision for special educational needs within the school. Where possible, the teacher with this planning role should have accessed professional development and attained recognised qualifications in special education.

22. Utilisation of additional teaching resources for students with special educational needs

The effective inclusion of students with special educational needs requires a whole-school approach which enables schools to meet the diverse needs of their student population in an efficient and timely manner.

Resources to support students should be deployed in accordance with the Guidelines being provided to accompany this Circular.

Schools should ensure that the additional Special Educational Needs Teaching Supports are used in their entirety to support students identified with special educational needs, learning support needs, and additional literacy such as English Additional Language Support.

The additional Teaching Resources which are being provided under this model cannot be used for mainstream class teaching, or to reduce the pupil teacher ratio in mainstream classes, or to provide additional subjects for pupils who do not have special educational needs.

In cases where there is misuse of Special Educational Needs Teaching Supports and where these resources are being used for purposes other than intended, as set out in this Circular, the Department reserves the right to review the allocations of Special Educational Needs Teachers which have been made to those schools.
23. Coordination Activities

The allocation includes provision for the conducting of planning and co-ordination activities required to ensure the most effective and optimal use of the special educational needs hours provided to schools, for children. The effective use of resources will be dependent upon effective timetabling practices that ensures continuity and avoids undue fragmentation of provision.

The extent of co-ordination time required to be used by schools will vary depending on school size, the number of students requiring additional teaching support, and the number of teachers proving this support. Co-ordination time, should however, be kept to a minimum in order to ensure that the most teaching time that can be provided for students can be given to those students.

24. Educational planning

Educational planning is an essential element of a whole-school approach to meeting students’ needs. Educational plans should be differentiated in line with student’s needs. A students educational support plan should include clear, measurable learning targets, and specify the resources and interventions that will be used to address student needs in line with the continuum of support process. Individualised support plans for students should be developed through a collaborative process involving relevant teachers, parents/guardians, the students themselves and outside professionals, as necessary. The individualised planning process should include regular reviews of learning targets as part of an ongoing cycle of assessment, target setting, intervention and review.

Guidelines for schools on educational planning and monitoring of outcomes and the manner in which they should conduct educational planning, through the Student Support File are contained in the Guidelines for Schools: Supporting Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools.

25. Supports for schools
Additional support and guidance will be available for school management and staff from Department agencies and services such as the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), and the DES Inspectorate.

If you have any queries with regards to this circular please contact Special Education Unit on
special.education@education.gov.ie

This circular can be accessed on the Department’s website www.education.ie

Jim Mulkerrins
Principal Officer
Special Education Unit

7th March, 2017
Appendix 1: Total Profile Allocation

Though the individual allocations will vary for each particular school, based on the number of students in each school qualifying within each category for whom a profiled allocation is being made, the allocation of the total existing resources for redistribution, based on a profiled allocation model for post primary schools will be as follows:

![Total Post Primary School Profiled Allocation](image)

**Baseline**

The Baseline allocation of each school profile is made up of 20% of the total number of Resource/Learning Support posts allocated to schools for the 2016/17 school year, redistributed equally between all schools, based on each school’s enrolment numbers for the 2015/16 school year, which is the most complete recent enrolment data available.

**Complex Needs**

Maintaining the existing 2016/17 Low Incidence allocations for post primary schools, in order to create the complex needs component for the introduction of the new allocation model from September 2017, means that approximately 61% of the total number of
Resource/Learning Support posts allocated to post primary schools for the 2016/17 school year are being used for the Complex Needs profile component.

**Standardised Test Results**

The portion of the overall resources being provided for Standardised test results under the school profile equates to approximately 12 % of the total allocation for post primary schools.

**Disadvantage**

Approximately 4.6% of the total profiled allocation for post primary schools is being allocated to provide some part of the allocation for disadvantage. This will vary between schools, depending on the social context of each school.

**Gender**

Approximately 2.4 % of the total profiled allocation for post primary schools will is being allocated to provide some part of the allocation for gender.

The actual breakdown of the profiles will vary between schools, depending on the number of students within each category of the profile.
Guidelines for Primary Schools

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Guidelines for Primary Schools - Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs

Introduction

The main purpose of this document is to provide guidance to schools on the use, organisation and deployment of additional teaching resources for pupils with special educational needs. This guidance is provided in the context of a revised model for allocating special education teaching resources which is being introduced by the Department of Education and Skills (the Department) in September 2017. Effective provision for pupils with special educational needs is situated within an inclusive whole-school framework which emphasises effective teaching and learning for all and good collaboration and engagement between schools, parents/guardians\(^1\) and pupils. These guidelines are intended to build on existing good practice in schools to support pupils with special educational needs.

About these guidelines

These guidelines reflect good practice in the education of pupils with special educational needs and are provided to assist schools in addressing the following questions:

1. Why is the allocation model changing?
2. What are the main features of the revised allocation model?
3. How can schools implement the revised allocation model effectively?

A three-step process to support pupils with special educational needs:

- How can we **identify** needs?
- How can we **meet** needs?
- How can we **monitor and report** on progress?

4. How can schools allocate special education teaching resources to effectively meet needs?

5. How can a whole-school approach enhance provision for pupils with special educational needs?

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\(^1\) Hereafter the term parent will be used to describe **both** parents and legal guardians.
1. **Why is the allocation model changing?**

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Report *Delivery for Pupils with Special Educational Needs* (NCSE 2014), highlighted a number of shortcomings associated with the system for allocating special education teaching resources to schools. On this basis, the NCSE recommended a revised allocation model. Following successful piloting in forty-seven primary and post-primary schools during the 2015-2016 school year, the Department decided to introduce a revised allocation model for all mainstream schools with effect from September 2017.

Special Education Circular 0013/2017 provides full details on the revised Special Education Teaching Allocation.

2. **What are the main features of the revised model for allocating special education teaching supports?**

Under the revised model, the Department provides special education teaching supports directly to schools based on their educational profiles (including a baseline component). This gives stability to schools’ staffing arrangements over a number of years. It offers schools greater autonomy to allocate teaching resources flexibly, based on pupils’ needs, without the requirement for a diagnosis of disability. A key principle underpinning this revised model is that all pupils, irrespective of special educational needs, are welcomed and enabled to enrol in their local schools. In addition, a fundamental objective is that special education teaching resources are utilised in the optimum manner to improve learning experiences and educational outcomes for pupils with special educational needs.

3. **How can schools implement the revised allocation model effectively?**

The following principles should be used by schools to guide the implementation of the revised model for allocating special education teaching supports. The Department acknowledges that these principles and practices are already well embedded in many schools.
Principles to guide the implementation process

- Resources provided to support pupils with special educational needs should be used to facilitate the development of truly inclusive schools.

- Supports provided to pupils with special educational needs should be based on identified needs and be informed by regular reviews of progress (in consultation with parents and pupils) as outlined in the Continuum of Support Guidelines.

- The class teacher has primary responsibility for the progress and care of all pupils in the classroom, including pupils with special educational needs.

- Special education teaching supports provided to schools should be used solely for the support of pupils with identified special educational needs, including those pupils for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL). The special education teaching supports **cannot** be used to reduce the pupil-teacher ratio in mainstream classes. Neither can they be used to allow any special education teacher sole responsibility for the delivery of any curriculum subject to any particular class.

- Pupils with the greatest levels of need should have access to the greatest level of support, and whenever possible, these pupils should be supported by teachers with relevant expertise who can provide continuity of support.

- Schools with more than one support teacher should establish and maintain a core team of teachers to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs. All members should have the necessary experience and access to continuing professional development to support the diverse needs of pupils with special educational needs.

These principles are further explored throughout this document and should inform a whole-school approach to provision for pupils with special educational needs.
A three-step process to support pupils with special educational needs

This section sets out a three-step process to guide identification, intervention and monitoring of outcomes for pupils with special educational needs.

**Step 1: How can we identify needs?**

The first step outlines a process for identifying pupils’ special educational needs using the Continuum of Support. This is followed by guidance on planning interventions for these pupils.

**The Continuum of Support**

The Department has set out the Continuum of Support framework to assist schools in identifying and responding to pupils’ needs. This framework recognises that special educational needs occur along a continuum, ranging from mild to severe, and from transient to long term, and that pupils require different levels of support depending on their identified educational needs. Using this framework helps to ensure that interventions are incremental, moving from class-based interventions to more intensive and individualised support, and that they are informed by careful monitoring of progress.

The Continuum of Support is a problem-solving model of assessment and intervention that enables schools to gather and analyse data, as well as to plan and review the progress of individual pupils.


This problem-solving process is illustrated as follows:

Identification of educational needs is central to the new model. Using the Continuum of Support framework, schools can identify pupils’ educational needs, to include academic, social and emotional needs, as well as needs associated with physical, sensory, language and communication difficulties. The framework emphasises the importance of looking at a pupil’s needs in context, and provides useful resources to support this (for example, Learning Environment Checklist, Teacher Checklist for Whole-class Structures and Supports).

The Continuum of Support enables schools to identify and respond to needs in a flexible way. This means that needs can be responded to as early as possible. Of course, the principle that pupils with the greatest level of need have access to the greatest levels of support is of primary importance. This approach is also supported by information and engagement with external professionals, as required.
The Continuum of Support suggests the following levels of support:

Table 1 below outlines how a school can collect evidence about pupils’ educational needs at each level of the Continuum of Support. This evidence can then be used to adapt teaching, to plan the next steps in pupils’ learning and to gauge their responses to interventions. When data are carefully collected, shared and compared, schools can identify and respond to all those pupils who have special educational needs.
### Table 1: Identification of Educational Needs through the Continuum of Support Process

| **Classroom Support** | The class teacher considers how to differentiate the learning programme effectively to accommodate the needs of all pupils in the class. A classroom support plan is developed and/or adjusted over time for those pupils who do not respond appropriately to the differentiated programme. This is informed by:  
- Parental consultation  
- Teacher observation records  
- Teacher-designed measures/assessments  
- Basic needs checklist*  
- Learning environment checklist*  
- Pupil consultation - My Thoughts About School Checklist  
- Literacy and numeracy tests  
- Screening tests of language skills  
A Classroom Support plan runs for an agreed period of time and is subject to review. |
| **School Support** | At this level a Support Plan is devised and informed by:  
- Teacher observation records  
- Teacher-designed measures/assessments  
- Parent and pupil interviews  
- Learning environment checklist  
- Diagnostic assessments in literacy/numeracy  
- Formal observation of behaviour including ABC charts, frequency measures  
- Functional assessment as appropriate, including screening measure for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties  
A support plan at this level may detail suitable teaching approaches including team-teaching, small group or individual tuition.  
A School Support Plan operates for an agreed period of time and is subject to review. |
| **School Support Plus** | This level of the Continuum is informed by a detailed, systematic approach to information gathering and assessment using a broad range of formal and informal assessment tools, reports from outside professionals (as appropriate) and may include:  
- Teacher observation and teacher-designed measures  
- Parent and pupil interviews  
- Functional assessment |
Educational planning

Provision for pupils with special educational needs is enhanced through clear identification processes and careful planning of interventions to address academic and/or personal and social development needs. Identification of needs, planning, target-setting and monitoring of outcomes are essential elements of an integrated and collaborative problem-solving process. The process involves the class teacher, special education teachers, parents, the pupil and relevant professionals. Interventions should draw on evidence-informed practice and the professional knowledge and experience of teachers. These interventions should reflect the priority learning needs of pupils, as well as building on their strengths and interests. Support plans should set out the agreed targets, the resources required, the strategies for implementation and a time-frame for review.

Student Support File

A Student Support File has been developed to enable schools to plan interventions and to track a pupil’s pathway through the Continuum of Support. It facilitates teachers in documenting progress and needs over time and assists them in providing an appropriate level of support to pupils, in line with their level of need. Following a period of intervention and review of progress, a decision is made as to the appropriate level of support required by the pupil. This may result in a decision to discontinue support, to continue the same level of support, or move to a higher or lower level of support.

*These checklists are available in the Continuum of Support Guidelines for Teachers

- Results of standardised testing such as measures of cognitive ability; social, emotional and behavioural functioning; adaptive functioning etc.

Data generated from this process are then used to plan an appropriate intervention and can serve as a baseline against which to map progress.

A support plan at this level is likely to be more detailed and individualised, and to include longer term planning and consultation.
The Student Support File, is available on the Department’s website and has the following features:

- A Word-formatted **Student Support File**, which allows schools to insert their own logo and to use and adapt the format as required
- A checklist which can be used (in part or in full) across all levels of the Continuum
- A flexible, generic ‘Support Plan’ and ‘Support Review Record’ that can be used at all levels of support
- An easy-to-view ‘Log of Actions’ page to summarise actions taken by the school

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**Student Support File Guidelines**


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Many different types of support plans can be included in the support file. A support plan can take the form of a general plan for support, a behavioural plan or contract, an individual profile and learning programme, an individual educational plan or a personalised pupil plan. The support plan format suggested in this document is just one example of formats, and schools may wish to modify and adapt, as appropriate.

As special educational needs can vary from mild to transient to significant and enduring, educational planning should reflect the level of need of the individual pupil. In this regard, the Student Support File facilitates a graduated response across the different levels of the Continuum: Classroom Support, School Support and School Support Plus. For pupils with significant, enduring and complex needs, collaboration with external professionals, including
multi-disciplinary teams, is advised (for example, occupational therapist, speech and language therapist and psychologist).

**Step 2: How can we meet needs?**

Having identified a pupil’s needs and the educational planning required to meet those needs, this second step emphasises the importance of effective teaching and learning strategies. The benefits of early-intervention and prevention programmes are highlighted. Guidance is also provided on target-setting.

**Effective teaching and learning: The role of the class teacher**

Effective teaching and learning is critically important for all pupils, and especially for those with special educational needs. Meaningful inclusion implies that all pupils are taught in stimulating and supportive classroom environments where they are respected and valued. Mainstream class teachers have first-line responsibility for the education of all pupils in their classes. Accordingly, classroom teachers should ensure that they plan their lessons carefully to address the diverse needs within the classroom. They may need to adapt their teaching approaches for some pupils whose individual progress, application, motivation, communication, behaviour or interaction with peers are causes for concern. This may require targeted interventions\(^2\) to develop relevant adaptive skills related to these needs. All mainstream class teachers should implement teaching approaches and methodologies that facilitate the meaningful inclusion of pupils with special educational needs. These include:

- Co-operative teaching and learning within mainstream classrooms
- Collaborative problem-solving activities
- Heterogeneous group work
- Differentiation
- Interventions to promote social and emotional competence
- Embedding Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in teaching, learning and assessment

\(^2\) For information on training and support for interventions, please see section on Continuing Professional Development, page 26
Every pupil needs to be taught a broad and balanced curriculum that is appropriate to his/her developmental level. Pupils’ levels of interest, attention, concentration and persistence should be gradually developed, extended and rewarded, using appropriate teaching strategies. To cater for the range of learning needs in any class, mainstream class teachers will regularly need to differentiate their lessons. This can be achieved by:

- Varying the level, structure, mode of instruction and pace of lessons to meet individual needs
- Adapting lessons to take account of pupils’ interests
- Matching tasks to pupils’ abilities and needs
- Adapting and utilising resources, including the use of technology
- Aspiring towards suitably challenging learning outcomes and assessing accordingly

Teachers can make lessons accessible to a broad range of pupils through the use of a variety of appropriate teaching approaches and methodologies, including active learning, small-group tuition, individual teaching, and scaffolded instruction. This may also require environmental adaptations to promote curricular access.

**Effective teaching and learning: The role of the special education teacher**

Special education teachers should be familiar with a wide range of teaching approaches, methodologies and resources to cater for particular learning styles and to meet a variety of needs. Teaching approaches will include a combination of team-teaching initiatives, cooperative teaching, early intervention and small group or individual support. Depending on the learning needs identified, a pupil with special educational needs may be supported at classroom level, or through mainstream classroom placement with additional teaching delivered through in-class or withdrawal support models.

**Some pupils with more complex and enduring needs may require specific methodologies, teaching approaches and/or learning activities. Such interventions should be based on careful identification of strengths and needs, including multi-disciplinary assessment, when necessary.**
Special education teachers, in consultation with class teachers, should plan their interventions carefully to address pupils’ priority learning needs and to achieve the targets identified in the relevant Continuum of Support plan. Short-term planning should reflect the Support Plan targets and should break down the development of skills and content into small incremental steps to address each pupil’s specific needs on a weekly basis. Outcomes for pupils should be routinely assessed, recorded and used to review progress. These outcomes should also be used to inform the targets for the next phase of intervention. Useful curricular resources include:

**Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities**


**Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT)**

[www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Inclusion/English_as_an_Additional_Language/IILT_Materials/Primary/](https://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Inclusion/English_as_an_Additional_Language/IILT_Materials/Primary/)

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**Early intervention and prevention**

In view of the substantial international evidence that early-intervention and prevention programmes can lead to improved outcomes for pupils, school leaders should ensure that some teaching resources are used for this purpose. As schools engage in a process of self-reflection and review, they will become aware of whole-school issues that may be addressed through early-intervention programmes, which are evidence-based and which are responsive to the local context.

Schools have the flexibility to innovate by developing and trialling new approaches and by using assessment data to evaluate the efficacy of these interventions. Developing and sharing successful practice has the potential to contribute to improvements in the overall provision for pupils with special educational needs.

Schools may find it helpful to deploy additional teaching resources in junior classes to strengthen station teaching approaches which target the promotion of language, literacy and numeracy skills. The use of early-intervention and prevention programmes helps mitigate the development of learning, social and emotional difficulties. *A Balanced Approach to Literacy*

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3 These guidelines were developed for the National Primary Curriculum (1999) although much of the content remains useful
Development is an example of a resource for early-intervention and prevention of literacy difficulties.

A Balanced Approach to Literacy Development in the Early Years


Schools could also seek advice and training in well-validated programmes to address behavioural and emotional needs, for example, the Incredible Years – Teacher Classroom Management programme as a means of preventing the emergence of behavioural difficulties; FRIENDS for Life as a means of preventing anxiety and building resilience, or similar evidence-based programmes.

Incredible Years: Teachers Classroom Management


FRIENDS for Life


In addition, the Department’s support services offer a wide range of programmes and resource materials related to the social, emotional and behavioural needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs. These programmes cover such issues as bullying, transition and behaviour management. A sample of programmes currently available includes:

Anti-Bullying Support Materials

www.pdst.ie/primary/antibullying

Transition from Primary to Post-Primary

www.sess.ie/resources/transition-primary-post-primary

Challenging Behaviour, Social Skills and Pupils with Special Educational Needs

http://www.sess.ie/challenging-behaviour-and-social-skills-students-special-educational-needs

Challenging Behaviour; Pathways to Prevention - a three-day course for teachers focusing on management of challenging behaviour in the classroom setting

http://www.sess.ie/challenging-behaviour-pathways-prevention-1
All intervention programmes should be carefully monitored to assess and record their impact on pupil progress, participation in learning and in school life. These programmes are most effective and achieve better outcomes when they are implemented as intended by the designers and when implementation is intensive and includes frequent opportunities for pupils to practise skills.

**Target-setting**

Good target-setting is central to effective teaching and learning for pupils with special education needs. There are four guiding principles when devising targets for pupils. Targets should be:

- Linked to assessment
- Strengths-based
- Linked to interventions
- Developed collaboratively

Best practice indicates that targets should be few in number; they should be informed by priority learning needs and directly linked to suitable interventions. Targets should be based on the evidence collected through both formal and informal assessment approaches. Schools should consult with parents when setting targets and reviewing progress. The views of pupils should also be included in this process, through their direct involvement in the discussion or by gathering their views in advance of the review process. This collaboration will help ensure that targets are relevant, meaningful, realistic, and that they draw on the strengths and interests of pupils.

Targets should be expressed in a way that is measurable and observable, and should reflect the specific special educational needs of individual pupils (for example, focus on social and emotional difficulties if that is a primary area of concern). While targets should be achievable within a specified time frame, they should also challenge and build on existing knowledge and address pupils’ holistic needs.

Appendix 1 illustrates how target-setting is an integral part of the problem-solving framework to support pupils with special educational needs.
Step 3: How can we monitor and record outcomes for pupils with special educational needs?

It is important that school leaders oversee a whole-school approach to monitoring and recording of progress. Pupils’ progress in relation to achieving their targets should be regularly and carefully monitored. This stage of the process is informed by effective measurement of baseline performance, including the use of criterion-referenced tests and other methods of assessment (for example, teacher-designed tests, checklists, samples of work, observation) that allow pupils to demonstrate their progress. This should lead to the establishment of specific targets to be achieved within a defined timeframe as outlined below.

Monitoring outcomes is part of a dynamic process of identification, target-setting, intervention and review, which in turn should lead to adjustments in support plans. The Student Support File provides schools with a useful resource to support and record this process. It includes a Support Review Record to guide teachers when monitoring progress and reviewing outcomes with parents and pupils. Such monitoring of progress, and subsequent adaptation of support plans, are key drivers of effective practice.

In addition to monitoring outcomes at the individual level, it is also important to review outcomes at group, class and whole-school level. This review could include measures of attainment, communication, independence, attendance, social inclusion and well-being (for example, sense of belonging and connectedness to school) for pupils with special educational needs.
4. How can schools allocate special education teaching resources to effectively meet needs?

Special education teachers must be deployed to address the needs of pupils with special educational needs in schools. An important aspect of the revised allocation model is that additional teaching supports are deployed according to identified needs, rather than being based on a diagnosis of disability. This gives schools greater autonomy and flexibility in how they allocate special education teaching resources. Schools may deploy special education teachers in a variety of ways in order to effectively meet pupils’ needs (for example, in-class support, group withdrawal). Schools’ previous experiences of allocating resources under the general allocation model will be useful in guiding them as they allocate resources under the revised model.

Effective communication and engagement with parents is critically important in moving towards a needs-based approach to the allocation of additional teaching resources. This is enhanced when parents are consulted in relation to their child’s needs, support plan, and are involved in regular reviews of progress.

When allocating teaching resources, schools should be mindful of the benefits of early-intervention and prevention programmes and should allocate teaching resources as required, based on identified needs and school context. Schools should also aim to strike a balance between in-class support, group and individual support. Importantly, the level and type of support should reflect the specific targets of individual pupils as set out in their support plans and be informed by careful monitoring and review of progress. In this way, following a period of intervention, some pupils may no longer require additional teaching supports, some may require the same level, while others may require more intensive supports.

When deploying teaching resources, schools need to maintain time for co-ordinating, planning and reviewing activities to ensure effective and optimal use of supports. Co-ordination time should, however, be kept to a minimum in order to ensure that teaching time is maximised. Additionally, flexibility in terms of resource allocation is required to allow for emerging needs during the school year. School principals should also take into account the professional development record and acquired expertise of teachers when allocating teaching roles and supports.
Planning the allocation of special education teaching supports

In planning the allocation of additional teaching supports, the over-riding principle is that resources are deployed to address the identified needs of pupils. **Importantly, those with the highest level of need should have access to the greatest level of support.** In addition to literacy and numeracy difficulties, many pupils will have specific needs in such areas as oral language, social interaction, behaviour, emotional development and application to learning. To guide them in allocating teaching supports, schools are again referred to the principles set out on page 5 of these guidelines. A planning template is provided in Table 2 to assist schools in the allocation of special education teaching. In addition, a school provision planning template is provided in Appendix 2 to support schools in planning and documenting provision for pupils with special educational needs at whole-school level.

| Table 2: Planning Template to Guide the Allocation of Additional Teaching Supports for Pupils with Special Educational Needs |
|---|---|
| Action 1: Identification of pupils with special educational needs | Review existing information on pupils’ needs, using school-based data, and any information from parents and external professionals. Engage in additional screening and data gathering as required, using informal and formal assessment approaches (for example, teacher observations, information on social and emotional competence, standardised tests, diagnostic tests). Identify all pupils with special educational needs in the school. Match their needs to the appropriate level on the Continuum of Support. |
| Action 2: Setting targets | Based on individual needs, set clear learning targets for each pupil at each level of the Continuum of Support. |
| Action 3: Planning teaching methods and approaches | Identify the level and type of intervention required to meet targets for each pupil on the Continuum of Support. Schools should consider methodologies best suited to promoting meaningful inclusion such as differentiation, heterogeneous grouping, team-teaching and small group teaching. They should also be mindful that the interventions and supports that they are using are evidence-informed. |
| Action 4: Organising early-intervention and prevention programmes | Based on identified needs, choose evidence-informed early-intervention/prevention programmes to address concerns. Identify time needed and staffing commitment required. |
### Action 5: Organising and deploying special education teaching resources

Cross-reference the needs of pupils at School Support and School Support Plus levels and consider common needs that can be met by grouping to ensure effective and efficient teaching and learning approaches. Agree which teacher(s) will cater for these groups/individuals and when and where the teaching will take place. Be mindful of the requirement that pupils with the greatest level of need should receive the greatest level of support from teachers with relevant expertise.

### Action 6: Tracking, recording and reviewing progress

Establish a tracking and recording system, to ensure that the progress of all pupils in meeting their identified targets is monitored:

- At Whole-school and Classroom Support level by all teachers
- At the School Support and School Support Plus levels by class teachers and special education teachers

Two case studies from the pilot schools and a worked example of how teacher allocation can be applied in a school setting are provided in Appendices 3 and 4. While it is not feasible to illustrate the application of the model to all types of schools, it is intended that these examples will be helpful in demonstrating how the revised allocation model can be used to meet the diverse needs in any given educational setting.

Appendix 5 provides contextualised guidance for the implementation of the revised allocation model in Gaeltacht schools and in Gaelscoileanna.

### 5. How can a whole-school approach enhance provision for pupils with special educational needs?

Good practice in the identification of need, education planning, and allocation of special education teaching is supported through effective whole-school planning. This section outlines key elements of an inclusive whole-school approach to supporting pupils with special educational needs.

It also explores key features related to

- Inclusive education
- Whole-school planning
Inclusive education

The NCSE (2011) described inclusion as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of learners. It involves removing barriers so that each learner will be enabled to achieve the maximum benefit from his/her schooling.

The Department acknowledges the very significant progress made by schools in developing inclusive practices and provision whereby the vast majority of pupils with special educational needs now attend mainstream schools. It also recognises that a small minority of pupils with significant and enduring needs may require a more specialist setting (for example, special class or special school placement).

A whole-school approach to special educational needs provision should reflect the Department’s commitment to the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools. Schools with strong inclusive cultures are characterised by:

- A positive ethos and learning environment whereby all pupils, including those with special educational needs, feel welcome and experience a sense of community and belonging
- An emphasis on promoting pupils’ participation and active engagement in their learning and in the life of the school
- A commitment to developing pupils’ academic, social, emotional and independent living skills
- A focus on high aspirations and on improving outcomes for all pupils

The following resources are available to schools to help them to identify and enhance inclusive education practice:
Whole-school planning

When implementing the revised allocation model to address the needs of pupils with special educational needs, schools should adopt a whole-school approach to programme planning and to the implementation of early-intervention and prevention programmes. In order to achieve this, schools will need to adapt their existing special educational needs policies to guide the new approach to the allocation of resources. A whole-school approach involves collaborative action by the school community (in consultation with parents and pupils) to improve pupil learning, behaviour and well-being. It encompasses a process of reflection, planning and review of policies and practices, and includes an evaluation of how pupils with special educational needs are identified by the school, the interventions that are put in place to meet their needs and how the outcomes of those interventions are measured and monitored. A whole-school approach should address the full continuum of needs - ranging from milder and more transient needs to difficulties that are severe and enduring (for example, significant learning, sensory, physical, communication, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties).

Schools have been engaging in the school self-evaluation (SSE) process and are familiar with the six-stage evaluation process - School Self-Evaluation Guidelines 2016 – 2020 (DES, 2016). In September 2016, the Inspectorate published Looking at Our School 2016 – A Quality Framework for Primary Schools (DES, 2016). When applied to a school’s provision for pupils with special educational needs, the domains and statements of practice enable teachers and school leaders to review their practices, to identify what they are doing well, and to recognise aspects of the school’s work that could be further developed to improve learning experiences and outcomes for these pupils (Appendix 6).

To assist schools in reflecting on their provision for pupils with special educational needs a Self-Reflective Questionnaire is provided (Appendix 7).
Role of school principal

The *Learning Support Guidelines* (2000, p.39) outlined the principal teacher’s overall responsibility for the education of children with special educational needs. Under the new allocation model the principal’s leadership role is central and includes the following:

- Developing inclusive whole-school policies and monitoring their implementation
- Assigning staff strategically to teaching roles, including special education roles
- Co-ordinating teachers’ work to ensure continuity of provision for all pupils
- Ensure that whole-school procedures are established to facilitate the effective involvement of parents, pupils and external professionals / agencies
- Ensuring that effective systems are implemented to identify pupils’ needs and that progress is monitored methodically
- Facilitate the continuing professional development of all teachers in relation to education of pupils with special educational needs, and ensure that all school staff (class teachers, special education teachers and special needs assistants) are clear regarding their roles and responsibilities in this area

Depending on the school’s size and context, some of these actions will be delegated to teams or other members of staff while the principal retains overall responsibility for the school’s provision for pupils with special educational needs.

Parental engagement

Good parental engagement is a critical factor in enhancing outcomes for pupils with special educational needs. This is recognised by schools and is seen in the many good practices and initiatives they use to promote parental involvement. Parental engagement is enhanced when parents are consulted in relation to their children’s needs and strengths, on the supports and
strategies being developed to support their children, and when they are involved in regular reviews of progress. The Continuum of Support process and use of the Student Support File provide valuable opportunities to engage with parents and to build a collaborative approach to identifying and responding to the needs of pupils with special educational needs. There may also be opportunities for parents to work collaboratively with the school through initiatives such as paired reading or Children and Parents Enjoying Reading (CAPER).

In addition to consultation around the individual needs of their child, parents also value receiving good information on the nature and type of the special educational needs provision available in the school. Schools should consult with parents when developing and reviewing polices relating to the education of children with special educational needs. This helps to ensure that parents understand the school’s approaches and better enables them to support their children in transitioning through the school.

Appendix 8 sets out some key questions which schools can use when reflecting on and reviewing their existing practice in promoting parental engagement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pupil engagement</th>
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</table>

Good engagement and participation in their own education has many associated benefits for pupils. This is particularly important for pupils with special educational needs and can help enhance their academic and social and emotional outcomes.

Engagement is enhanced when schools listen to and build on pupils’ interests, aspirations and strengths when developing educational interventions. This involves actively including pupils in a shared assessment for learning process, setting shared learning objectives, and jointly reviewing progress. Pupil participation is supported through teaching that is responsive to the personal needs of the learner, and is further enhanced by structuring and pacing learning experiences that are challenging, engaging and enjoyable. The Student Support File offers a useful framework for promoting pupil engagement and participation at all stages of educational planning and review.

At the whole-school level, schools are encouraged to review their approaches to pupil engagement and participation so that all pupils, including those with special educational needs, have opportunities to share their views on issues that affect them in school, and so contribute
to reviews of relevant policies and practices in schools. The resource below can be used to support pupil engagement.

My Thoughts about School (See page 97 of Behavioural, Emotional & Social Difficulties: A Continuum of Support – Guidelines for Teachers)


Engagement with external bodies and agencies

Support and guidance is available to teachers from external professionals such as NEPS Psychologists, Special Education Needs Organisers (SENO), the NCSE Support Service⁴, the Inspectorate, and allied health professionals. It is important that schools have established procedures / protocols for liaising with these services and bodies in order to optimise the quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs at the individual, group or whole-school level. This is especially important for those pupils with more significant and enduring needs who benefit from a multi-disciplinary approach to identification of need and the development of interventions.

The needs of many pupils span both health and education services. Health services (HSE and HSE-funded services) will continue to play an important role in early identification, assessment and diagnosis, intervention and review for pupils with special educational needs. It is important that schools are familiar with the range of health services in their locality, including referral pathways. Co-ordination is enhanced when schools liaise with and contribute to health-led assessment and delivery of interventions and when they facilitate meetings between parents and various support services. Schools should endeavour to incorporate relevant recommendations from health professionals in developing support plans at each level of the Continuum of Support.

⁴ It is planned that an NCSE Support Service will be established incorporating the Special Education Support Service (SESS), National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS), and the Visiting Teacher Service. The focus of this service will be to improve the capacity in schools to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs.
Good planning and support for transition helps to ensure the successful transfer of pupils from pre-school to primary school, from primary school to post-primary school and between special and mainstream settings. Effective transition support and planning can enhance the educational experience of the child and help reduce potential anxiety. Many schools already have excellent practices in place to support pupils at various transitional points.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has developed a suite of materials to support the reporting and transfer of pupil information from primary to post-primary schools. The materials are presented under the umbrella title of Education Passport and are available at www.ncca.ie/transfer. They include:

- 6th Class Report Card
- My Profile sheet (for children)
- My Child’s Profile sheet (for parents)
- A Special Educational Needs Summary Form is included to support the sharing of information for children with identified learning needs.

Since the 2014/15 school year schools have been required to use the Education Passport materials detailed above and forward to the relevant post-primary school, following confirmation of enrolment, ideally by end of June (Circular 45/2014).

Additional resources for schools in planning for effective transitions are provided below.

**Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs to Make Successful Transitions**


**Transfer from Pre-school to Primary**

**Transfer from Primary to Post-primary School**
Continuing professional development (CPD)

Research has consistently shown that the quality of teaching is the most critical factor in enhancing pupils’ learning and educational experiences. The revised allocation model provides more stability in staffing levels (and less part-time clustering). It is envisaged that schools will establish and maintain skilled special education support teams to guide provision. Since all teachers have responsibility for teaching pupils with special educational needs, it is important that all staff members engage in appropriate CPD to develop the capacity of schools to meet the educational needs of all pupils.

Schools should regularly review their ongoing professional development needs, with reference to the provision of quality teaching and learning in both the mainstream classroom and special education settings. Educational leaders should consider their own training needs in order to develop an inclusive whole-school approach to special educational needs provision. Schools can use the self-reflective questionnaire (Appendix 7) and other audit instruments (see CPD audit tool below) to review their professional development needs and to plan suitable training initiatives. It is also beneficial for teachers to become involved in local professional networks (within the school itself and with other schools) where good special educational needs practice and disability awareness can be shared and promoted. The links below can be used to access supports from the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and the Special Education Support Service (SESS). Support from NEPS is progressed through the regular school planning process with the assigned NEPS psychologist.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>PDST</th>
<th>SESS</th>
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<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.pdst.ie/sse/p">http://www.pdst.ie/sse/p</a></td>
<td><a href="http://www.sess.ie/support">http://www.sess.ie/support</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>CPD Audit Tool</td>
<td><a href="http://www.sess.ie/cpd-audit-tools">http://www.sess.ie/cpd-audit-tools</a></td>
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Appendix 1: Target-setting as part of the problem-solving framework

How do we evaluate targets?
- Standardised tests
- Screening tests
- Observations
- Interviews
- Teacher measures
- Check lists
- Consultation
- Ratings

Evaluation of child’s response to targets informs the next step of the problem-solving cycle

Targets are written as desired skills which are:
- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Relevant
- Time Limited

Targets should be expressed in definitive language to facilitate monitoring and review of progress, for example:

- John will correctly identify the first 50 Dolch Words with 80% accuracy
- Sean will speak in a full sentence which includes a subject, verb and object
- Anne will use her PECS to request an activity break

What data can help us set targets?
- Standardised tests
- Screening tests
- Observations
- Interviews
- Teacher measures
- Check lists
- Consultation
- Ratings

What is the concern?
Starting Point

Did it work?
Review

How can we help?
Planning and Intervention

Why is it happening?
Information gathering and assessment

Targets are informed by information gathering and assessment

How can we help?
Planning and Intervention

What is the concern?
Starting Point
Appendix 2: School provision plan for pupils with special educational needs

School: ___________________________________________ Roll No: ______________

School Year: ______________ Reviewed: ______________

Special Educational Needs Teaching: ___________ hours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Name:</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Brief description of role and duties</th>
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Pupils with Special Educational Needs who are in receipt of interventions through the Continuum of Support Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description of SEN</th>
<th>Nature of Supports</th>
<th>Focus of Support</th>
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<tr>
<td>Classroom</td>
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5 Schools may hold information on pupils and level of support on a class basis, as an integral part of classroom planning.
Appendix 3: Case studies from pilot project

CASE STUDY 1: SCHOOL A

School A is a two-teacher school with two part-time support teachers. The school did not gain additional staffing under the pilot. It decided to use the themes of the pilot to help in the flexible deployment of its teaching resources to specifically target needs identified by the teachers.

Step 1:
Identification of pupils with special educational needs
The new model allowed the school to blend the duties of the existing learning-support and resource teacher roles into one flexible approach allowing greater continuity and catering for a greater number of pupils. At the beginning of the pilot year, the school reviewed its existing approaches to identifying pupils’ needs, in light of the staffing arrangements and the needs of all of its pupils. Teachers analysed the results of standardised tests and also shared their own observations of pupils’ learning needs. They identified some pupils with learning needs who had not been entitled to additional teaching under the old allocation model and the school was now able to provide substantial support to these pupils without the requirement for a professional diagnosis. The school used the group consultation method as part of its problem-solving approach to agreeing interventions.

Step 2:
Setting learning targets
The teachers found the Continuum of Support approach to be very useful in matching interventions to pupils’ needs. The pilot project allowed the school to deploy the Continuum of Support earlier in the pupils’ educational journey in order to proactively meet their needs. Targets were set using the Continuum of Support to guide interventions for pupils, with a focus on literacy, numeracy, language and social and behavioural needs. By using the pilot guidelines and by availing of CPD during the pilot the school improved the quality of its target-setting. Pupil support plans were designed to meet pupils’ needs and to affirm their efforts.

Step 3:
Planning teaching methods and approaches
The school increased its emphasis on identifying and addressing the needs of pupils in the mainstream classrooms as part of its approach to the Continuum of Support. Pupils were supported through differentiation in mainstream classes, in-class support teaching and small group withdrawal. In planning teaching approaches, the staff paid particular attention to matching the interventions to pupils’ needs and to ensuring that teaching led to continuity and progression in pupils’ learning. The incorporation of specific targets and objectives in planning helped the school to successfully break down learning into logical and incremental steps related to pupils’ abilities and priority needs.

Step 4:
Organising early-intervention and prevention programmes
The teachers engaged very positively with NEPS and SESS, and were able to access supports on programmes relevant to the school’s identified needs. During the pilot year the school introduced programmes such as Toe by Toe, phonics programmes, precision teaching, elements of Reading Recovery, Mata sa Rang, Lego group, social stories and early-intervention and multi-sensory approaches.
Step 5:
**Organising and deploying teaching resources**

The school welcomed the flexibility and professional autonomy associated with the allocation model which enabled them to intervene earlier based on pupils’ needs. The school was able to allocate responsibility to better address particular academic, language and social needs. In reviewing the pilot project, the staff emphasised the real contribution of class teachers in identifying and addressing needs proactively. The teachers decided to offer some interventions at class level and others through small group withdrawal. The school used the flexibility of the model and good communication with parents to provide support to a greater number of pupils.

Step 6:
**Tracking and recording**

Planning and assessment for pupils with special educational needs improved in the school and this enabled teachers to monitor and record progress for pupils using a range of formal and informal measures. At the end of the pilot year, teachers were able to demonstrate substantial progress, particularly in behaviour, social skills and reading.

**CASE STUDY 2: SCHOOL B**

School B is a large boys’ school in an urban area with over 400 pupils.

Step 1:

**Identification of pupils with special educational needs**

The school sought to ensure that its additional teaching resources were used to facilitate the development of an inclusive school, and that support provided to pupils was based on their identified needs and informed by regular reviews of progress. Summaries of professional reports, teacher checklists, as well as standardised test results (Senior Infants to 6th class) were examined. Parents were consulted when planning Classroom-Support interventions.

A staged response in keeping with the Continuum of Support was utilised. The deputy principal, as lead resource teacher, consulted with class teachers to identify needs and to use documented evidence to signal any changes to be made in provision. This was used to inform the pupils’ new teachers about their needs in June in preparation for September. Through the use of the Continuum of Support, decisions could now be made earlier on how best to support pupils in their new classes. The school used a wider range of standardised tests than previously to establish baselines before and after intervention. Teachers also used their own checklists for Classroom Support interventions.

Step 2:

**Setting learning targets**

Special education support teachers worked more collaboratively with each other and with class teachers. Teachers targeted key areas of oral language, literacy social skills and numeracy.
Step 3:
Planning teaching methods and approaches

Class teachers liaised with the learning support teachers. They were able to identify learning needs early and to use differentiation effectively within mainstream classes. Strong team work was a significant strength of the school. Support teachers worked collaboratively with class teachers to provide in-class support. Reading Recovery and its spin-off, Literacy Lift off, were introduced in Senior Infants. Staff members availed of relevant CPD from the various support services for schools to develop their capacity.

Step 4:
Organising early-intervention and prevention programmes

As a result of the teachers’ collaboration, there was a greater emphasis on using additional support as a preventative measure. For example, interventions were provided for pupils for whom English is an additional language, and homework clubs and chess club were established as after-school activities. Teachers drew effectively on the NEPS guidelines for pupils with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. Support for younger pupils improved as a result of participation in the pilot and the introduction of Aistear. The school introduced other innovations, including the use of an individualised reading scheme and enrichment programmes, particularly in the area of comprehension, for all pupils in senior infants. As part of its early-intervention programme with junior infants, a particular set of pupils was selected for small group tuition in literacy and numeracy for up to fourteen weeks. Maths Recovery was implemented over the fourteen-week period with pre-test and post-test assessments. Reading Recovery was implemented and monitored over twenty weeks. Intensive interventions on phonics (sound linkage) were provided over four to six weeks through the English Learning Support group.

Step 5:
Organising and deploying teaching resources

The model gave the school the ‘leeway’ to devise new approaches and to optimise its allocation of resources. This applied especially to pupils with social and emotional difficulties, including pupils with anxiety. A decision was made to create teams of support teachers who would use discrete time-bound interventions for social skills teaching. The school operated a mixture of team-teaching and withdrawal for English and Mathematics which worked very well, while in-class team-teaching was used to develop social skills, with small group withdrawal to reinforce the teaching of key skills.

Step 6:
Tracking and recording

The school developed a register of pupils with a clear description of the how pupils were supported at each level of the Continuum of Support. In a simple clear document, the principal and Special Educational Needs team could monitor where pupils were on the Continuum of Support. As a result, record-keeping for pupils with special educational needs has improved. More consultations now take place between the class teachers and the learning support teachers. Target-setting is more precise. The school has reviewed how information relevant to each class is transferred towards the end of each school year. Each classroom teacher maintains a specific support file for pupils in the class. These files contain samples of pupils’ work,
professional assessments, pupil feedback and target-setting signed by parents, teachers and pupils. Checklists from the NEPS Behavioural, Emotional & Social Difficulties guidelines were adjusted and tailored to the school’s needs.

Meetings with parents about devising individual education plans (IEPs) take place during parent-teacher meetings in November. Since adopting the new approach, the school also arranges additional follow-up meetings to review IEPs in April. This is much appreciated by parents, and the emphasis is on reviewing progress in literacy, numeracy, behaviour and social development and other IEP targets. The school has seen a 90% attendance rate by parents at these meetings. Informal meetings also take place between members of the special education team, class teachers and parents when the need arises. These meetings may be face-to-face meetings or may be carried out by phone call.
Appendix 4: A Worked Example

An example of how the revised special education teaching allocation model could be applied in a school setting

This is a worked example of how the allocation model could be applied using the case of a mixed national school with 230 pupils. This example uses the planning template, outlined in Table 2 (page 19) of these Guidelines, and follows the sequence of actions suggested there.

While it is not feasible to show all possible types of schools and settings, this example is intended to illustrate how the revised allocation model could be implemented. A sample timetable is provided as a guide only and doesn’t cover the full range of possible options.

A mixed school with an enrolment of 230 pupils. Allocation under new model: 75 hours, three full-time special education teachers.

| Action 1: Identification of pupils with special educational needs | Review existing information on pupils’ needs, using school based data and information from external professionals where available. Engage in additional screening and data gathering as required, using both formal and informal assessment approaches (e.g. standardised tests, diagnostic tests, information on social and emotional competence etc.). Identify all the pupils at each levels of the Continuum of Support. |

The following extracts from the school’s provision plan illustrate how the needs of some pupils with SEN might be met. These extracts are not intended to be comprehensive but provide examples of provision planning at each level of the Continuum of Support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom Support</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupil Name</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sam &amp; Vikram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom, Abdullah and Emily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shazia, Peter and Laura</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damien</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abeo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oisin and Ethan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
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</table>
### School Support

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Pupil Name</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Description of SEN</th>
<th>Focus of Support</th>
<th>Type of Support &lt;sup&gt;6&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jamel</td>
<td>S. Inf</td>
<td>EAL</td>
<td>Language support</td>
<td>Small group support, In-class support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinéad</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>Reading and spelling</td>
<td>Station teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxim</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>Reading and spelling</td>
<td>Station teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carl</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>Reading and spelling</td>
<td>Station teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fran</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Numeracy</td>
<td>Addition and subtraction</td>
<td>Team-teaching, small group support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ciara</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Motor co-ordination</td>
<td>Fine and gross motor skills</td>
<td>Small group support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leigha</td>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Needs arising from language difficulties</td>
<td>Specific difficulties with receptive language</td>
<td>Individual support initially, followed by small group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feargual</td>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Needs arising from ASD</td>
<td>Reading comprehension and Self-organisation</td>
<td>Small group support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td>Self-regulation and attention</td>
<td>Small group support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seán</td>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td>Self-regulation</td>
<td>Small group support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Needs arising from ASD</td>
<td>Self-organisation and independence skills Transition planning</td>
<td>Individualised, small group support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James*</td>
<td>6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Literacy and well-being</td>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>Individual, peer tutoring and small group support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*James’ School Support plan is illustrated under Action 2 overleaf.

---

<sup>6</sup> All pupils also receive differentiated support in the classroom. Type of support is subject to review and may be amended according to need.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Support</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Description of SEN</th>
<th>Focus of Support</th>
<th>Type of Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>J. Inf</td>
<td>Needs arising from Down syndrome, including significant learning and language delay</td>
<td>Self-organisation Independence skills Pre-literacy Pre-numeracy</td>
<td>In-class, individual support, peer tutoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caroline</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Needs arising from Intellectual Disability</td>
<td>Literacy and numeracy—(NCCA curriculum) Independence skills Social skills</td>
<td>In-class, small group support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Physical needs arising from Cerebral Palsy</td>
<td>Academic skills Fine and gross motor Assistive technology</td>
<td>In-class, small group support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>Behaviour and emotional needs arising from ADHD</td>
<td>Following instructions Initiation and completion of tasks Turn taking Yard behaviour Self-esteem</td>
<td>Individual, small group support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophie</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>Severe literacy difficulty</td>
<td>All areas of literacy Use of assistive technology</td>
<td>Individual, small group support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philip</td>
<td>6th</td>
<td>Needs arising from ASD and Intellectual Disability</td>
<td>Communication skills Anxiety Transition planning Academic skills Social skills</td>
<td>Individual, small group support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7 All pupils also receive differentiated support in the classroom. Type of support is subject to review and may be amended according to need.
### Action 2: Setting Learning Targets

Based on individual needs, set clear learning targets for each pupil at each level of the Continuum of Support.

For each child with identified needs, the school generated targets for learning and set these out in a Support Plan. See James’ Support Plan below.

### SUPPORT PLAN*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom Support</th>
<th>School Support</th>
<th>School Support Plus</th>
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</table>

To be completed by the teacher(s).


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student’s name</th>
<th>James Hickey</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>11 years 6 months</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lead teacher</th>
<th>Mr. Ward (6th Class Teacher)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class/year</td>
<td>6th</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Start date of plan</th>
<th>October 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review date of plan</td>
<td>February 2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Student’s strengths and interests**

James loves sport and is good at hurling. He is a kind, gentle boy, who is sensitive to the needs of others. James is motivated to do well and always tries his best. He is very knowledgeable and enthusiastic about sport.

**Priority concerns**

- James does not like to read aloud in class and his reading is slow and hesitant.
- He finds spelling very difficult and avoids using words he does not know how to spell in written work.
- James is very aware of his difficulties and rarely offers to participate in class discussion.

**Possible reasons for concerns**

James’ difficulties arise in the context of an identified specific literacy difficulty. His reading and spelling skills have been slow to respond to intervention to date. He also has had a number of losses in his personal life that have impacted on his confidence and well-being.

**Targets for the student**

James to be able to read independently for pleasure from a range of differentiated materials.
James will prepare and read a short passage, from his levelled reader, to his class teacher each week.
James will offer more frequent contributions to classroom discussion – put up his hand and answer a question once per day, initially, increasing to two and three contributions per day by the end of term.

**Strategies to help the student achieve the targets**

James to participate in a reading partners scheme- to be matched with a younger child (1 term).
James to complete the SNIP word reading programme to increase word reading and fluency skills.
James to be encouraged to do his class project on an aspect of sport and to co-present with his good friend Paul.
James to have a key words notebook, for use in class and at home.
Teacher to continue to differentiate spelling homework and mark his work with a focus on the spelling of key words only.
James to be encouraged and quietly praised for contributing in class.
James to participate in weekly small group cookery class to build his self-esteem and sense of belonging to school.

**Staff involved and resources needed**

Mr. Ward and Ms McMahon (see timetable)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of parent(s)/ guardian(s)</th>
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<tr>
<th>Signature of teacher</th>
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</table>
**Action 3: Planning teaching methods and approaches**

Identify the level and type of intervention required to meet targets for each pupil on the Continuum of Support. Schools should consider methodologies best suited to promoting meaningful inclusion such as differentiation, heterogeneous grouping, team-teaching small-group teaching, and individualised support, where necessary. They should also be mindful of the need for interventions and supports to be evidence-informed.

When the school reflected on the needs of the pupils, they identified a number of key areas for intervention. Among these were:

- The identified needs of each pupil were considered at School Support and School Support Plus. Appropriate groupings and pairings were identified. Some pupils were identified for additional individualised support.

- At infant level, team-teaching was considered the most appropriate support for most pupils.

- Clusters of literacy needs were identified in the middle and senior classes. Evidence-informed literacy interventions, such as *Paired Reading*, *SNIP*, and *Toe by Toe* were used as appropriate. The NEPS literacy resource *Effective Interventions for Struggling Readers* was used as a good practice guide by teachers.

- A number of pupils in 3rd and 4th class, including one child with ASD, were identified as having social, emotional and behavioural needs. Small-group work and in-class support were considered as effective ways to support these pupils.

- A number of pupils in 5th and 6th class required support with social skills, self-regulation and organisation arising from needs associated with ASD. There was a need to include transition preparation and planning for these pupils in advance of their transfer to post-primary school.
A review of school-based data and teacher reports highlighted a number of areas for interventions. Among these were:

- In the junior and senior infant classrooms, there was a need for in-class support to develop language and literacy skills. The school implemented suggestions from the NEPS resource, *A Balanced Approach to Literacy Development in the Early Years* to provide support for all children in the infant classes. In addition, Ms McMahon provided in-class support each morning for one hour, over a term and Mr O’Neill provided in-class support in senior infants for 45 minutes, three mornings a week, over a term.

- In the 4th class group, there were a number of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural needs. The evidence-based FRIENDS for Life programme was identified as an appropriate intervention at whole class level. The programme was delivered by the 4th class teacher in collaboration with Ms McMahon for 80 minutes per week, over a term.

- It was decided to run a Reading Partners programme that matched 5th and 6th class pupils with pupils in infants, for one term. Ms McMahon and the class teacher delivered this intervention three days a week for thirty minutes.

- A transition programme for all 6th class pupils was implemented to support the move to post-primary school. Lessons explored: reading timetables, managing lockers and organisation of homework. Intensive group intervention was provided for some pupils with more specific needs. The NEPS resource – *Transfer from Primary to Post-Primary School* was used. This involved the class teacher and Ms McMahon for 45 minutes a week over the course of the summer term.
**Action 5:**
Organising and deploying special education teaching resources

Cross-reference the needs of pupils at the School Support and School Support Plus levels and consider common needs that can be met by grouping to ensure effective and efficient teaching and learning approaches.

Agree which teacher(s) will cater for these groups and when and where the teaching will take place. Be mindful of the requirement that pupils with the greatest level of need, receive the greatest level of support from teachers with relevant expertise.

Consider co-ordinating activities to ensure the optimal use of teaching resources and the most appropriate time for these activities to take place.

---

There are three special education teachers in this school: Ms McMahon, Ms Doyle and Mr O’Neill. Some aspects of Ms McMahon’s caseload are outlined below, including a sample timetable:

Ms McMahon has a particular interest in early literacy development and recently attended training in A Balanced Approach to Literacy Development in the Early Years in her local Education Centre. She undertook in-class support with junior infants, guided by this approach.

The school recognised the importance of the requirement for pupils with the greatest level of need to receive the greatest level of support. Therefore, Adam (JI) who has significant needs was supported through one hour of in-class support every morning (shared, of course with others), and 30 minutes individual teaching time per day, broken into 2 or 3 ten-minute activities.

Kevin, who has social, emotional and behavioural needs, received support at break time, facilitated by his class teacher who reminded him of his behaviour targets prior to going out. He was also supported by staff members on yard duty. All teachers were briefed to ensure consistent behavioural reinforcement strategies.

Kevin was supported with short end-of-day sessions to help him reflect on his behaviour, focusing on what went well and preparing for the coming day. To facilitate this, Kevin had a twenty-minute individual session with Ms Mc Mahon from Monday to Wednesday. On Friday afternoons, he joined a cookery group to develop his self-regulation skills and to improve his sense of connectedness to school.
### Sample Timetable for Ms McMahon* (Summer term)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.00-10.00</td>
<td>In-class support for Language, Literacy and Numeracy, Junior Infants. Focus on Adam, Sam and Vikram.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.00-10.45</td>
<td>Sinéad, Maxim and Carl 1st class Literacy</td>
<td>Sinéad, Maxim and Carl 1st class Literacy</td>
<td>Sinéad, Maxim and Carl 1st class Literacy</td>
<td>Sinéad, Maxim and Carl 1st class Literacy</td>
<td>Sinéad, Maxim and Carl 1st class Literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.45-11.00</td>
<td>Break</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.00-11.30</td>
<td>Adam (JI)</td>
<td>Adam (JI)</td>
<td>Adam (JI)</td>
<td>Adam (JI)</td>
<td>Adam (JI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.30-12.00</td>
<td>Team teaching (numeracy) 2nd class</td>
<td>Team teaching (numeracy) 2nd class</td>
<td>Team teaching (numeracy) 2nd class</td>
<td>Team teaching (numeracy) 2nd class</td>
<td>Team teaching (numeracy) 2nd class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.00-12.30</td>
<td>5th and 6th class pupils; Reading Partners with Adam, Sam and Vikram</td>
<td>James 6th class Literacy</td>
<td>5th and 6th class pupils; Reading Partners with Adam, Sam and Vikram</td>
<td>James 6th class Literacy</td>
<td>5th and 6th class pupils; Reading Partners with Adam, Sam and Vikram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.30-1.00</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.00-1.45</td>
<td>Leigah 4th class (focus on receptive language and reading comprehension)</td>
<td>Leigah 4th class (focus on receptive language and reading comprehension)</td>
<td>Sixth class transition programme</td>
<td>Cookery / practical numeracy/social skills/self-esteem development (Kevin, James, Philip and Leigah)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.45-2.20</td>
<td>Small group transition programme</td>
<td>Small group transition programme</td>
<td>Lego group (language / social skills)</td>
<td>Feargal, Sean and Leigah (4th class)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.20-2.40</td>
<td>Kevin Day review and planning session</td>
<td>Kevin Day review and planning session</td>
<td>Kevin Day review and planning session</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*When deploying teaching resources schools can maintain time for co-ordinating, planning and review activities to ensure effective and optimal use of supports. Co-ordination time, should however, be kept to a minimum in order to ensure that teaching time is maximised.

### Action 6

**Tracking recording and reviewing progress**

Establish a tracking and recording system, to ensure that the progress of all pupils in meeting their established targets is monitored:

- **At whole-school level** by all teachers
- **At the Classroom Support level of the Continuum** by class teachers and whole school approaches
- **At the School Support and School Support Plus** levels by class teachers and special education teachers

The school used the **Student Support File** and the Continuum of Support process to track and monitor progress.

Teachers also used class and whole-school data to monitor and review the progress of pupils.
Appendix 5: Advice for Gaeltacht schools and Gaelscoileanna on the implementation of the revised model for allocating special education teaching

The Context
Irish-medium education should provide for the needs of all pupils including those with special educational needs. Pupils from various linguistic backgrounds attend Irish-medium schools located in both Gaeltacht and non-Gaeltacht areas.

There are different linguistic contexts both inside and outside of Gaeltacht areas, and inside and outside of every class in all-Irish schools or in schools located in the Gaeltacht. These backgrounds should be recognised and taken into account as supports are allocated. Schools are reminded that, in the context of Irish-medium education, the development of pupils’ proficiency in both Irish and English literacy should be addressed in accordance with pupils’ educational needs, as appropriate.

To support the implementation of the revised allocation model, Irish-medium schools should consider the following issues:

- School communities should be made aware of the efficacy and suitability of Irish-medium education to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs.

- In developing their whole-school approaches to literacy, Irish-medium schools should consider both the social and academic language needs of the child.

- Schools should revise their assessment and special education policies to identify pupils’ needs in Irish, English and Mathematics on the appropriate standardised tests. Results from these tests should be used to identify needs and to guide the allocation process appropriately.

- Schools should use some of their allocation to provide supports in Irish to pupils with special educational needs where this is needed for them to access the curriculum in its entirety.

- It may be beneficial to draft an oral language support programme, in accordance with the linguistic needs of the child at infant level, with a focus on language acquisition and enrichment. In-class and / or team-teaching approaches have been shown to may be the most effective way to implement such programmes as an approach to early intervention.

- In the context of schools practising full early-immersion education, supports should be provided through the medium of Irish at infant level for Irish and Mathematics.

- Irish-medium schools should communicate and collaborate at local level to identify their continuing professional development needs in the area of special education. These needs should be discussed with the support services with a view to accessing training and identifying and sharing best practice.

DES Circular 0013/2017, on Special Education Teaching Allocation, notes that in Irish-language schools the support provided for pupils by schools to assist with pupils’ literacy development may be conducted in Irish or English, or a combination of both, as considered necessary by the school.
Appendix 6: Looking at our school 2016 – A quality framework for primary schools

Schools may find the following standards from the teaching and learning dimension of the quality framework particularly helpful in providing for pupils with special educational needs.

**Domain: Learner Experiences**

**All pupils should be enabled to:**
- Engage purposefully in meaningful learning activities
- Grow as learners through respectful interactions and experiences that are challenging and supportive
- Reflect on their progress as learners and develop a sense of ownership of and responsibility for their learning
- Experience opportunities to develop the skills and attitudes necessary for lifelong learning

**In order to achieve this, all teachers should:**
- Plan for assessing pupils’ attainment of the intended learning objectives of the lesson, or series of lessons, using both assessment of learning and assessment for learning
- Maintain assessment records that are clear, useful and easy to interpret and share
- Meaningfully differentiate content and activities in order to cater for the varying needs and abilities of pupils
Appendix 7: Self-reflective questionnaire

Better Services, Better Outcomes for Children with Special Educational Needs

Self-Reflective Questionnaire

This questionnaire is provided as a resource to schools for the revised allocation model. The self-reflective questionnaire is designed to help schools and teachers to address the following questions outlined in these Guidelines for Primary Schools:

- How can we **identify** pupils’ needs?
- How can we **meet** these needs?
- How can we **monitor and report** on progress?
- How can a school allocate its resources to effectively meet needs?
- How can our school plan at whole-school level to ensure effective provision for pupils with special educational needs?

The questionnaire is intended for use by the school itself and should be used as a dynamic, developmental document to inform implementation of the revised allocation model in schools. Ideally, the questionnaire should be completed collaboratively within the school and the questionnaire itself should serve as a stimulus for reflection and discussion. The prompt questions in the questionnaire encourage teachers to examine their existing practices and to identify any changes needed to implement the revised allocation model. Schools may also wish to use or modify the questionnaire to review their special educational needs policies or to evaluate their progress in implementing the allocation model. Schools will not be required to submit the questionnaire to the Department or any of its agencies.
### How can we identify pupils’ needs?

How do we use the Continuum of Support and Student Support Files to provide a documented and staged-approach to identifying pupils’ needs?

- *When do our class teachers decide to initiate Classroom Support Plans?*
- *Do we consider individual needs across a broad range, including academic, social, communication, emotional, behavioural?*
- *Do we identify environmental and contextual issues which need modification (visual, hearing, physical, sensory)?*
- *How often are support plans developed and reviewed and who should be involved in this process?*

How do we gather the information we need to inform our decision making so that we can provide the greatest level of support to those with the greatest needs?

- *What observational records help us with identifying needs?*
- *What types of assessment help us with screening and identification of needs?*
- *How do we integrate information from pupils, parents, external professionals and early education settings to assist with identification of needs?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What are our strengths?</th>
<th>What are our areas for improvement?</th>
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### What are our strengths?

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<tr>
<th>What are our areas for improvement?</th>
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### How can we improve?

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How can we meet these needs?

What steps are class teachers taking to exercise their primary responsibility for the learning and well-being of all pupils in their classes?

- Are all teachers using a variety of teaching approaches (including multi-sensory) in response to diverse needs?
- What strategies are employed at class level to overcome barriers to learning and participation?
- How is learning broken down into logical and manageable steps to ensure appropriate learning challenges for all?
- To what extent are lessons co-operative, collaborative and hands-on?
- Are there any standards or statements of good practice from Looking at Our Schools 2016 which would be useful in providing for better learning experiences and outcomes for our pupils?

How do our special education teachers and class teachers collaborate to meet the needs of pupils and to ensure their progress?

- Do we use early-intervention programmes in our mainstream classrooms across the school?
- How do special education teachers support class teachers with in-class supports, group and individual withdrawal?
- How do all staff work together to support pupils with social, emotional and behavioural needs?

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<th>What are our strengths?</th>
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How can we improve?

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How can we **monitor and report on progress**?

Are we using a cyclical problem-solving approach to planning, teaching and review which results in the devising of clear targets relevant to our pupils’ priority learning needs?

- *How do we set targets and devise plans for our pupils which identify needs and which can be monitored and recorded?*
- *How do class teachers and special education teachers collaborating around the development and review of support plans?*
- *How do we ensure that progress on the targets is incremental for pupils over time?*
- *How can we assess the effectiveness of programmes/interventions we use?*
- *How do we monitor at group, class and whole-school level?*
- *Can we innovate and extend our practices?*

Who do we consult with and what is involved in monitoring the outcomes/progress?

- *How do we involve parents and pupils in monitoring progress?*
- *How do we communicate the progress our pupils have made?*

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<th>What are our strengths?</th>
<th>What are our areas for improvement?</th>
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**How can we improve?**
How can our school allocate its resources to effectively meet needs?

How do we identify the needs of all pupils with special educational needs in the school and use the Continuum of Support approach to ensure that the greatest level of support is provided to pupils with the greatest needs?

- Could we quantify and organise our support for pupils with special educational needs through use of the School Provision Plan (Appendix 2)?
- When devising support plans, how do we use the Continuum to identify priority learning needs at all three levels (Classroom Support, School Support, and School Support Plus)?
- What kind of approaches and interventions are we using at a whole school level to support early intervention and prevention?

How can we best decide on roles and responsibilities in providing supports for pupils, monitoring progress and contributing to future plans for the pupils?

- How can we merge the existing responsibilities of the resource and learning-support teachers into a special education team approach?
- Can we timetable and co-ordinate interventions efficiently with reference to
  - available resources (in-class approaches, group work and minimal individual withdrawal)?
  - continuity of support (avoiding a pupil having several different teachers)?
  - the particular needs of pupils?

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<th>What are our strengths?</th>
<th>What are our areas for improvement?</th>
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How can we improve?

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How can our school plan at whole-school level to ensure effective provision for pupils with special educational needs?

How do we plan at whole-school level to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs?

- *How do we foster an inclusive approach to address the diversity of needs in our school?*
- *How do we promote pupils’ sense of connection to their school, peers and teachers?*
- *Have we reviewed our ongoing professional development needs, with reference to quality teaching and learning in both the mainstream classroom and special education support settings?*
- *How do we consult with parents in relation to the supports and strategies being used in our school?*
- *How do we foster pupil engagement and participation in their learning and in the life of the school?*
- *Have we established procedures / protocols for liaising with support services?*

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How can we improve?

What are our strengths?

What are our areas for improvement?
Appendix 8: Parental Involvement

In reflecting on and reviewing a school’s existing practice in encouraging parental involvement the following points could be taken into consideration, both in terms of existing and future actions:

- How are parents consulted and informed about the nature of special education needs provision and policy in school?
- How are parents consulted when special education supports (for example, Classroom Support/School Support/School Support Plus) are being proposed for their child?
- Do we involve parents at each level of the Continuum of Support process?
- To what extent is regular communication facilitated with parents who have a child with a special educational need?
- What barriers might prevent parents from being fully involved in supporting their child in school? What may be helpful in overcoming these barriers?
- Do we provide opportunities for parents to learn more about special education issues through contact with other agencies and services?
- How can we support staff members in engaging effectively with parents?
## Schools may wish to access the following resources to meet the diverse needs of their pupils

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NCCA’s Special Educational Needs and the Primary Curriculum

http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Primary_Education/Primary-Education/SEN-and-the-Primary-Language-Curriculum/
Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools

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Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools - Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs

Introduction

The main purpose of this document is to provide guidance to schools on the use, organisation and deployment of additional teaching resources for students with special educational needs. This guidance is provided in the context of a revised model for allocating special education teaching resources which is being introduced by the Department of Education and Skills (the Department) in September 2017. Effective provision for students with special educational needs is situated within an inclusive whole-school framework which emphasises effective teaching and learning for all and good collaboration and engagement between schools, parents/guardians\(^1\) and students. These guidelines are intended to build on existing good practice in schools and to complement the advice given in *Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs: Post-Primary Guidelines* (DES, 2007).

About these guidelines

These guidelines reflect good practice in the education of students with special educational needs and are provided to assist schools in addressing the following questions:

1. Why is the allocation model changing?
2. What are the main features of the revised allocation model?
3. How can schools implement the revised allocation model effectively?
   
   A three-step process to support students with special educational needs:
   
   - How can we *identify* needs?
   - How can we *meet* needs?
   - How can we *monitor and report* on progress?
4. How can schools allocate special education teaching resources to effectively meet needs?
5. How can a whole-school approach enhance provision for students with special educational needs?

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\(^1\) Hereafter the term parent will be used to describe both parents and legal guardians.
1. Why is the allocation model changing?

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Report *Delivery for Students with Special Educational Needs* (NCSE, 2014), highlighted a number of shortcomings associated with the system for allocating special education teaching resources to schools. On this basis, the NCSE recommended the introduction of a revised allocation model. Following successful piloting in forty-seven primary and post-primary schools during the 2015-2016 school year, the Department decided to introduce a revised allocation model for all mainstream schools with effect from September 2017.

Special Education Circular 0014/2017 provides full details of the revised Special Education Teaching Allocation.

2. What are the main features of the revised model for allocating special education teaching supports?

Under the revised model, the Department provides special education teaching supports directly to schools based on their educational profiles (including a baseline component). This gives stability to schools’ staffing arrangements over a number of years. It offers schools greater autonomy to allocate teaching resources flexibly, based on students’ needs, without the requirement for a diagnosis of disability. A key principle underpinning this revised model is that all students, irrespective of special educational needs, are welcomed and enabled to enrol in their local schools. In addition, a fundamental objective is that special education teaching resources are utilised in the optimum manner to improve learning experiences and educational outcomes for students with special educational needs.

3. How can schools implement the revised allocation model effectively?

The following principles should be used by schools to guide the implementation of the revised model for allocating special education teaching supports. The Department acknowledges that these principles and practices are already well embedded in many schools.
Principles to guide the implementation process

- Resources provided to support students with special educational needs should be used to facilitate the development of truly inclusive schools.

- Supports provided to students with special educational needs should be based on identified needs and be informed by regular reviews of progress (in consultation with parents and students) as outlined in the Continuum of Support Guidelines.

- The subject teacher has primary responsibility for the progress and care of all students in the classroom, including students with special educational needs.

- Special education teaching supports provided to schools should be used solely for the support of students with identified special educational needs, including those students for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL). The special education teaching supports **cannot** be used to reduce the student-teacher ratio for general subject teaching or to provide additional subject options for students who do not have special education needs.

- Students with the greatest levels of need should have access to the greatest level of support, and whenever possible, these students should be supported by teachers with relevant expertise who can provide continuity of support.

- Schools should establish and maintain a core team of teachers to meet the needs of students with special educational needs. All members should have the necessary experience and access to continuing professional development to support the diverse needs of students with special educational needs.

These principles are further explored throughout this document and should inform a whole-school approach to provision for students with special educational needs.
A three-step process to support students with special educational needs

This section sets out a three-step process to guide identification, intervention and monitoring of outcomes for students with special educational needs.

**Step 1: How can we identify needs?**

The first step outlines a process for identifying students’ special educational needs using the Continuum of Support. This is followed by guidance on planning intervention for these students.

**The Continuum of Support**

The Department has set out the Continuum of Support framework to assist schools in identifying and responding to students’ needs. This framework recognises that special educational needs occur along a continuum, ranging from mild to severe, and from transient to long term, and that students require different levels of support depending on their identified educational needs. Using this framework helps to ensure that interventions are incremental, moving from class-based interventions to more intensive and individualised support, and that they are informed by careful monitoring of progress.

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**Special Educational Needs: A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Teachers**


**A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools: Resource Pack for Teachers**


**For a leaflet outlining how to support students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties in post-primary schools, go to:**


**English as an additional language guidelines for Teachers**

http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Inclusion/English_as_an_Additional_Language/IILT_Materials/Post-primary/
The Continuum of Support is a problem-solving model of assessment and intervention that enables schools to gather and analyse data, as well as to plan and review the progress of individual students.

This problem-solving process is illustrated as follows:

Identification of educational need is central to the new model. Using the Continuum of Support framework, schools can identify students’ educational needs, to include academic, social and emotional needs, as well as needs associated with physical, sensory, language and communication difficulties. The framework emphasises the importance of looking at a student’s needs in context, and provides useful resources to support this (for example, Learning Environment Checklist, Teacher Checklist for Whole-Class Structures and Supports).

Many students will have their special educational needs identified prior to their transfer to post-primary school. It is important for schools to gather information on students’ learning from primary schools and parents in order to plan provision and to ensure continuity and progression in the students’ education.
The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has developed a suite of materials to support the reporting and transfer of pupil information from primary to post-primary schools. The materials are presented under the umbrella title of Education Passport and are available at www.ncca.ie/transfer. They include:

- 6th Class Report Card
- My Profile sheet for children
- My Child’s Profile sheet for parent(s)
- A Special Educational Needs Summary Form is included to support the sharing of information for children with identified learning needs

Since the 2014/15 school year, schools are required to use the Education Passport materials detailed above and to forward them to the relevant post-primary school, following confirmation of enrolment, ideally by the end of June (Circular 45/2014).

For students with a high level of need, transition meetings may be arranged between primary and post-primary schools in advance of transfer. The Post-Primary Transfer Review Form provides a useful template for collating assessment data relating to students’ academic, attainment and personal development needs in order to inform intervention planning following transition.

A post-primary school may use its own assessment practices to provide further screening and diagnostic information to support the planning process for students with special educational needs. The following resources may be used to inform assessment and identification of need:

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| NCCA Passport                                                           | [http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Pri
mary-Education/Assessment/Report_Card_Templates/transfer/](http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Pri
mary-Education/Assessment/Report_Card_Templates/transfer/) |
| Post-Primary Transfer Review Form                                       | [https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Collegs/Services/National-Educational
Psychological-Service-NEPS-/NEPS-Guidelines-Handouts-and-Tips/Transfer-from-Primary-to-Post-
primary/Transition-to-Post-Primary-Transfer-Profile.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Collegs/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-
Service-NEPS-/NEPS-Guidelines-Handouts-and-Tips/Transfer-from-Primary-to-Post-
priority/Transition-to-Post-Primary-Transfer-Profile.pdf) |
|                                                                         | [http://trythetests.erc.ie/testdetail/Drumcondra_Post_Primary_Reading_Test](http://trythetests.erc.ie/testdetail/Drumcondra_Post_Primary_Reading_Test) |
The Continuum of Support provides a framework for schools to enable them to identify and respond to students’ needs in a flexible way. This process is also supported through engagement with external professionals, as required.

The Continuum of Support suggests the following levels of support:
Table 1 below outlines how a school can collect evidence about students’ educational needs at each level of the Continuum of Support. This evidence can then be used to adapt teaching, to plan the next steps in students’ learning and to gauge their responses to intervention. When data and information are carefully collected, shared and compared, schools can identify and respond to those students who have special educational needs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Identification of Educational Needs through the Continuum of Support Process</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Whole-School and Classroom</strong> (Support for All)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Intake screening</td>
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<td>- Collection of information from primary schools, including Student Passport</td>
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<td>- Teacher observation</td>
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<td>- Teacher assessment</td>
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<td>- Learning Environment Checklist</td>
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<td>- Student Support Team involvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Standardised tests of literacy/numeracy</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Student consultation</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Parental consultation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Where students continue to present with significant difficulties, despite whole-school interventions (such as differentiated teaching, a mentoring programme or social skills group), School Support (for Some) is initiated.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>School Support</strong> (for Some)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Teacher observation records</td>
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<td>- Teacher-designed measures / assessments</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Parent/student interview</td>
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<td>- Learning environment checklist</td>
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<td>- Diagnostic assessments in literacy/numeracy</td>
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<td>- Formal observation of behaviour including ABC charts, frequency measures</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Functional assessment as appropriate, including screening measures for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support at this level can take many forms, for example: team-teaching, small group or individualised tuition, peer mentoring, inclusion in social skills groups, behaviour reward and consequence systems.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A Support Plan operates for an agreed period of time and is subject to review.</td>
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</table>
**Educational planning**

Provision for students with special educational needs is enhanced through clear identification processes and careful planning of interventions to address academic and/or personal and social development needs. Identification, planning, target-setting and monitoring of outcomes are essential elements of an integrated and collaborative problem-solving process. The process involves the subject teacher, special education teachers, parents, the student and relevant professionals. Interventions should draw on evidence-informed practice and the professional knowledge and experience of teachers. These interventions should reflect the priority learning needs of students, as well as building on their strengths and interests. Support plans should set out the agreed targets, the resources required, the strategies for implementation and a time-frame for review.

**Student Support File**

A Student Support File has been developed to enable schools to plan interventions and to track a student’s pathway through the Continuum of Support. It facilitates teachers in documenting progress over time and assists them in providing an appropriate level of support to students, in line with their level of need. Following a period of intervention and review of progress, a decision is made as to the appropriate level of support required by the student. This may result in a decision to discontinue support, to continue the same level of support, or move to a higher or lower level of support.

The Student Support File is available on the Department’s website and has the following features:
• A Word-formatted **Student Support File**, which allows schools to insert their own logo and to use and adapt the format as required
• A checklist which can be used (in part or in full) across all levels of the Continuum
• A flexible, generic ‘Support Plan’ and ‘Support Review Record’ that can be used at all levels of support
• An easy-to-view ‘Log of Actions’ page to summarise actions taken by the school

**Student Support File Guidelines**


Many different types of support plans can be included in the support file. A support plan can take the form of a general plan for support, a behavioural plan or contract, an individual profile and learning programme, an individual educational plan or a personalised student plan. The support plan format suggested in this document is just one example of formats, and schools may wish to modify and adapt, as appropriate.

As special educational needs can vary from mild and transient to significant and enduring, educational planning should reflect the level of need of the individual student. In this regard, the Student Support File facilitates a graduated response across the different levels of the Continuum. For students with significant, enduring and complex needs, collaboration with external professionals, including multi-disciplinary teams, is advised (for example, occupational therapist, speech and language therapist and psychologist).

To support students with special educational needs effectively in schools and to ensure consistency of approach, it is important that all teachers (including subject teachers, special education teachers and guidance counsellors) have access to relevant information from the student’s support plan. This will help teachers to differentiate their subject teaching to meet the needs of their students, and to set specific targets related to their subject areas. Schools, therefore, need to develop systems for effective sharing of information, in accordance with data protection legislation.
Step 2: How can we meet needs?

Having identified a student’s needs and the educational planning required to meet those needs, the second step emphasises the importance of effective teaching and learning strategies. The benefits of early-intervention and prevention programmes are highlighted. Guidance is also provided on target-setting.

Effective teaching and learning: The role of the subject teacher

Effective teaching and learning is critically important for all students, and especially for those with special educational needs. Meaningful inclusion implies that all students are taught in stimulating and supportive classroom environments where they are respected and valued. Subject teachers have first-line responsibility for the education of all students in their classes. Accordingly, subject teachers should ensure that they plan their lessons carefully to address the diverse needs within the classroom. They may need to adapt their teaching approaches for some students whose application, motivation, communication, behaviour or interaction with peers are causes of concern. This may require targeted interventions\(^2\) to develop relevant adaptive skills related to these needs. Students should be provided with opportunities to be active participants in their own learning through lessons that are carefully planned to include independent and collaborative tasks and reinforcement of skills’ development. All subject teachers should implement teaching approaches and methodologies that facilitate the meaningful inclusion of students with special educational needs. These include:

- Co-operative teaching and learning within mainstream classrooms
- Collaborative problem-solving activities
- Heterogeneous group work
- Differentiation
- Interventions to promote social and emotional competence
- Embedding of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in teaching, learning and assessment

\(^2\) For information on training and support for interventions, please see section on Continuing Professional Development, pages 31-32.
Students’ levels of interest, attention, concentration and persistence should be gradually developed, extended and consolidated, using appropriate teaching strategies. To cater for the range of learning needs in any class, subject teachers will regularly need to differentiate their lessons. This can be achieved by:

- Varying the level, structure, mode of instruction and pace of lessons to meet individual needs
- Adapting lessons for students’ interests
- Matching tasks and processes to students’ abilities and needs
- Adapting and utilising resources, including use of technology
- Aspiring towards suitably challenging learning outcomes and assessing accordingly

Teachers can make lessons accessible to a broad range of students through the use of a variety of appropriate teaching approaches and methodologies, including active learning, small-group tuition, individual teaching, and scaffolded instruction. This may also require appropriate environmental adaptations to promote curricular access.

Every student should be taught a curriculum that is appropriate to his/her developmental level. In matching programmes to students’ needs, school leaders are encouraged to examine the range of curriculum options available, including Junior Certificate Schools Programme, Junior Certificate Level 2 Learning Programmes and Leaving Certificate Applied Programme.

**Effective teaching and learning: The role of the special education teacher**

Special education teachers should be familiar with a wide range of teaching approaches, methodologies and resources to cater for particular learning preferences and to meet a variety of needs. Teaching approaches could include a combination of team-teaching initiatives, co-operative teaching, early intervention, small group or individual support.

Some students with more complex and enduring needs may require specific methodologies, teaching approaches and/or learning activities. Such interventions should be based on careful identification of strengths and needs, including multi-disciplinary assessment, when necessary.
Special education teachers, in consultation with subject teachers, should plan their interventions carefully to address students’ priority learning needs and to achieve the targets identified in the relevant Student Support Plan. Short-term planning should reflect the support plan targets and should break down the development of skills and content into small incremental steps to address each student’s specific needs. Outcomes for students should be routinely assessed, recorded and used to review progress. These outcomes should also be used to inform the targets for the next phase of intervention. Useful resources include:

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**Early intervention and prevention**

In view of the substantial international evidence that early-intervention and prevention programmes can lead to improved outcomes for students, school leaders should ensure that some teaching resources are used for this purpose. As schools engage in a process of self-reflection and review, they will become aware of whole-school issues that may be addressed through early-intervention programmes, which are evidence-based and which are responsive to the local context. Focused interventions to develop literacy, social, emotional, life-skills and

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³ These guidelines were developed for Junior Certificate subjects but a lot of the guidance remains useful for the Junior Cycle specifications.
well-being are particularly important for junior cycle students with special educational needs (see reference below to *Junior Cycle Well-being Guidelines* (NCCA, 2017).

Schools have the flexibility to innovate by developing and trialling new approaches and by using assessment data to evaluate the efficacy of these interventions. Developing and sharing successful practice has the potential to contribute to improvements in the overall provision for students with special educational needs.

Schools could seek advice and training in well-validated approaches to address literacy, behavioural and emotional needs, for example *Effective Interventions for Struggling Readers, My FRIENDS Youth*, as a means of preventing anxiety and building resilience, or similar evidence-based programmes.

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<th>Effective Interventions for Struggling Readers</th>
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<tr>
<th>My FRIENDS Youth - Emotional resilience programme</th>
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<th>Junior Cycle Well-being Guidelines</th>
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<tr>
<th>Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention</th>
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In addition, the Department’s support services offer a wide range of programmes and resource materials related to addressing the social, emotional and behavioural needs of all students, including those with special educational needs. These programmes cover such issues as bullying, transition and behaviour management. A sample of programmes/resources currently available includes:
All intervention programmes should be carefully monitored to assess and record their impact on student progress, participation in learning and in school life. These programmes are most effective and achieve better outcomes when they are implemented as intended by the designers, and when implementation is intensive and includes frequent opportunities for students to practise skills.

Student Support Teams serve an important preventative and early-intervention function, particularly in relation to addressing the needs of students with social, emotional, behavioural and well-being needs. The teams provide a forum to share concerns and to work towards solutions. They play an important co-ordinating role and facilitate monitoring and review of students’ progress. For more information on Student Support Teams see:

Target-setting

Good target-setting is central to effective teaching and learning for students with special education needs. There are four guiding principles when devising targets for students. Targets should be:

- Linked to assessment
- Strengths-based
- Linked to interventions
- Developed collaboratively
Best practice indicates that targets should be few in number. They should be informed by priority learning needs and directly linked to suitable interventions. Targets should be based on the evidence collected through both formal and informal assessment approaches. School personnel should consult with parents when setting targets and reviewing progress. The views of students should also be included in this process through their direct involvement in the discussion or by gathering their views in advance of the review process. This collaboration will help ensure that targets are relevant, meaningful, realistic, and that they draw on the strengths and interests of students.

Targets should be expressed in a way that is measurable and observable, and should reflect the specific special educational needs of individual students (for example, focus on social and emotional difficulties if that is a priority area of concern). While targets should be achievable within a specified time frame, they should also challenge and build on existing knowledge and address students’ holistic needs.

Appendix 1 illustrates how target-setting is an integral part of the problem-solving framework to support students with special educational needs.

**Step 3: How can we monitor and record outcomes for students with special educational needs?**

It is important that school leaders oversee a whole-school approach to the monitoring and recording of progress. Students’ progress in relation to achieving their targets should be regularly and carefully monitored. This stage of the process is informed by effective measurement of baseline performance, including the use of criterion-referenced tests and other methods of assessment (for example, teacher-designed tests, checklists, samples of work, observation and reports from subject teachers, form tutors and year heads) that allow students to demonstrate their progress. This should lead to the establishment of specific targets to be achieved within a defined timeframe, as outlined below.
Monitoring outcomes is part of a dynamic process of identification, target-setting, intervention and review, which in turn should lead to adjustments in support plans. The Student Support File provides schools with a useful resource to support and record this process. It includes a Support Review Record to guide teachers when monitoring progress and reviewing outcomes with parents and students. Such monitoring of progress, and subsequent adaptation of support plans, are key drivers of effective practice.

In addition to monitoring outcomes at the individual level, it is also important to review outcomes at group, class and whole-school level. This review could include measures of attainment, communication, independence, attendance, social inclusion and well-being (for example, sense of belonging and connectedness to school) for students with special educational needs.

4. **How can schools allocate special education teaching resources to effectively meet needs?**

Special education teachers must be deployed to address the needs of students with special educational needs in schools. An important aspect of the revised allocation model is that additional teaching supports are deployed according to identified needs, rather than being based on a diagnosis of disability. This gives schools greater autonomy and flexibility in how they allocate special education teaching resources. Schools may deploy special education teachers in a variety of ways in order to effectively meet students’ needs (for example, in-class support, group withdrawal).

Effective communication and engagement with parents is critically important in moving towards a needs-based approach to the allocation of additional teaching resources. This is
enhanced when parents are consulted in relation to their child’s needs, support plan, and are involved in regular reviews of progress.

When allocating teaching resources, schools should be mindful of the benefits of early-intervention programmes and should allocate teaching resources as required, based on identified needs and school context. Schools should also aim to provide additional targeted support to students within the context of a mainstream subject lesson through team-teaching, through group or individual withdrawal or, through a combination of these modes of intervention.

Importantly, the level and type of support should reflect the specific targets of individual students as set out in their support plans and be informed by careful monitoring and review of progress. In this way, following a period of intervention, some students may no longer require additional teaching supports, some may require the same level, while others may require more intensive supports. Accordingly, the groupings timetabled for withdrawal may change over time.

When deploying teaching resources, schools need to maintain time for co-ordinating, planning and reviewing activities to ensure effective and optimal use of supports. Co-ordination time should, however, be kept to a minimum in order to ensure that teaching time is maximised. Additionally, flexibility in terms of resource allocation is required to allow for emerging needs during the school year. School leaders should also take into account the professional development record and acquired expertise of teachers when allocating teaching roles and supports.

**Timetabling**

It is advised that a core team of teachers be allocated timetables dedicated to special education duties. Schools should adopt a flexible approach to timetabling to ensure that extra capacity is available to address changing needs during the year. Accordingly, some members of the special education team may be allocated flexible timetables with inbuilt capacity to respond to additional needs. In deciding their approaches to timetabling, schools are advised to consider the following:
- The overall school timetable should be designed carefully to make appropriate provision for students with special educational needs
- Members of the special education support team should be consulted when the timetable is being developed
- A core special education team should be developed in order to provide greater stability and continuity of support
- Provision should be made for the special education teachers to support subject teachers through team-teaching/in-class/co-operative teaching and joint planning
- Provision should be made for the withdrawal of students for focused individual and/or group intervention where warranted. Targeted small-group interventions, using evidence-informed programmes for students with similar needs, can be an effective way to use resources
- The impact of withdrawal on students’ access to the curriculum with their year groups should be considered
- Timetables should be flexible to cater for the specific needs of students. For example, it may not be appropriate for all students who are exempted from Irish to be grouped for special education needs provision due to the diversity of their presenting needs
- A continuity of support to address the special educational needs of students in the senior cycle should be provided

### Planning the allocation of special education teaching supports

In planning the allocation of additional teaching supports, the over-riding principle is that resources are deployed to address identified needs of students. **Importantly, those with the highest level of need should have access to the greatest level of support.** In addition to literacy and numeracy difficulties, many students will have specific needs in such areas as communication, social interaction, behaviour, emotional development and application to learning. To guide the allocation of teaching supports, schools are again referred to the principles set out on page 5 of these guidelines. A planning template is provided in Table 2 to assist schools in the allocation of special education teaching. In addition, a school provision
A planning template is provided in Appendix 2 to support schools in planning and documenting provision for students with special educational needs at whole-school level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Planning Template to Guide the Allocation of Additional Teaching Supports for Students with Special Educational Needs</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action 1: Identification of students with special educational needs</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Action 2: Setting targets</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Action 3: Planning teaching methods and approaches</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action 4: Organising early-intervention and prevention programmes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action 5: Organising and deploying special education teaching resources</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Action 6: Tracking, recording and reviewing progress** | Establish a tracking and recording system, to ensure that the progress of all students in meeting their identified targets is monitored:  
- At **Whole-School (Support for All) level** by all teachers  
- At the **School Support (for Some ) and School Support Plus (for a Few) levels** by subject teachers and special education teachers |
A case study from a pilot school is provided in Appendix 3 as a demonstration of how the revised allocation model was used to meet the diverse needs in that school.

Appendix 4 provides contextualised guidance for the implementation of the revised allocation model in Irish medium post-primary schools.

## 5. How can a whole-school approach enhance provision for students with special educational needs?

Good practice in the identification of need, education planning, and allocation of special education teaching is supported through effective whole-school planning. This section outlines key elements of a whole-school approach to supporting students with special educational needs.

It also explores key features related to:

- Inclusive education
- Whole-school planning
- Role of school principal
- Special Education Needs Team
- Parental engagement
- Student engagement
- Engagement with external bodies and agencies
- Transitions
- Continuing professional development

### Inclusive education

The NCSE (2011) described inclusion as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of learners. It involves removing barriers so that each learner will be enabled to achieve the maximum benefit from his/her schooling.

In line with inclusive principles, schools are advised to include students meaningfully in mainstream mixed-ability class groupings. This helps ensure high expectations and enables
students with special educational needs to learn alongside their peers. Mixed-ability teaching has beneficial effects for all students and helps promote social and personal development.

The Department acknowledges the very significant progress made by schools in developing inclusive practices and provision whereby the vast majority of students with special educational needs now attend mainstream schools. It also recognises that a small minority of students with significant and enduring needs may require a more specialist setting (for example, special class or special school placement).

A whole-school approach to special educational needs provision should reflect the Department’s commitment to the inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream schools. Schools with strong inclusive cultures are characterised by:

- A positive ethos and learning environment whereby all students, including those with special educational needs, feel welcome and experience a sense of community and belonging
- An emphasis on promoting students’ participation and active engagement in their learning and in the life of the school
- A commitment to developing students’ academic, social, emotional and independent living skills
- A focus on high aspirations and on improving outcomes for all students

The following resources are available to schools to help them to identify and enhance inclusive education practice:

Inclusive Education Framework
http://ncse.ie/inclusive-education-framework

Inclusion of students with special educational needs: A checklist
http://www.sess.ie/cpd-audit-tools

Universal design for learning
www.cast.org/
The Special Education Support Service (SESS)\(^4\) also offers training for teachers that directly relates to promoting inclusive practices in post-primary schools. This includes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leading Inclusive Learning Principals’ Seminar – Post-Primary</th>
<th>Leading Inclusive Learning in Resource Teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This is a one-day course for principal teachers in leading and managing an inclusive post-primary school.</td>
<td>This is a one-day course for resource and learning support teachers in mainstream post-primary schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.sess.ie/leading-inclusive-learning-principals-seminar-post-primary">http://www.sess.ie/leading-inclusive-learning-principals-seminar-post-primary</a></td>
<td>This course provides substantial insight into the current landscape of teaching and learning, and sets the context for whole-school and individual planning for the teaching and learning of students with special educational needs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Full Calendar of SESS Courses: [http://www.sess.ie/calendar](http://www.sess.ie/calendar)

The National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) provides support and training for a range of prevention and early intervention programmes and approaches that aim to promote positive behaviour and learning throughout the school by focusing on developing skills, attitudes and knowledge in the following areas:

- Behaviour for Learning
- Social and Emotional Literacy
- Literacy, Numeracy, Language and Learning
- Wellbeing

See [www.nbss.ie](http://www.nbss.ie) for more information

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\(^4\) It is planned that a NCSE Support Service will be established incorporating the Special Education Support Service (SESS), National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS), and the Visiting Teacher Service. The focus of this service will be to improve the capacity in schools to meet the needs of students with special educational needs.
Whole-school planning

When implementing the revised allocation model to address the needs of students with special educational needs, schools should adopt a whole-school approach to programme planning and to the implementation of early-intervention and prevention programmes. In order to achieve this, schools will need to adapt their existing special educational needs policies to guide the new approach to the allocation of resources. A whole-school approach involves collaborative action by the school community (in consultation with parents and students) to improve student learning, behaviour and well-being. It encompasses a process of reflection, planning and review of policies and practices, and includes an evaluation of how students with special educational needs are identified by the school, the interventions that are put in place and how the outcomes of those interventions are measured and monitored. A whole-school approach should address the full continuum of needs, ranging from milder and more transient needs to difficulties that are severe and enduring (for example, significant learning, sensory, physical, communication, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties).

Schools have been engaging in the school self-evaluation (SSE) process and are familiar with the six-stage evaluation process - *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines 2016 – 2020* (DES, 2016). In September 2016, the Inspectorate published *Looking at Our School 2016 – A Quality Framework for Post-primary Schools* (DES, 2016). When applied to a school’s provision for students with special educational needs, the domains and statements of practice enable teachers and school leaders to review their practices, to identify what they are doing well, and to recognise aspects of the school’s work that could be further developed to improve learning experiences and outcomes for these students (Appendix 5).

To assist schools in reflecting on their provision for students with special educational needs a Self-Reflective Questionnaire is provided (Appendix 6).

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**School Self-Evaluation Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools**


**Looking at our School 2016 – A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools**

Role of the school principal

The Department’s post-primary guidelines on inclusion outlines the role of the school principal in supporting students with special educational needs. It states that ‘Under current legislation the principal of the school has overall responsibility for ensuring that the special educational needs of students are met. As a consequence, the principal has the general responsibility for establishing and promoting whole-school policies and procedures that are supportive of the learning of all students, including those with special educational needs’ (Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs: Post- Primary Guidelines; DES, 2007, p 67).

The role of the school principal includes the following:

- Assume overall responsibility for the development and implementation of the school’s policies and procedures relating to the inclusion of students with special educational needs
- Oversee a whole-school approach to assessment and screening to identify needs and to guide the allocation of appropriate supports
- Ensure effective engagement with feeder primary schools to support the transition of students with special educational needs
- In collaboration with the in-school management team, discharge a key function in the deployment of staff, allocation of resources, organisation of students and timetabling
- Ensure that systems are in place for effective sharing of relevant information on students’ needs with all subject teachers
- Facilitate the continuing professional development of all teachers in relation to the education of students with special educational needs, and ensure that all school staff (subject teachers and special education teachers, guidance counsellors, special needs assistants) are clear regarding their roles and responsibilities in this area
- Ensure that whole-school procedures are established to facilitate the effective involvement of parents, students and external professionals/agencies

In implementing the new resource allocation model, principals should give careful consideration to the formation of a special education needs team whose members have expertise and interest in special education so that provision can be co-ordinated efficiently and flexibly to meet a range of needs. Subject to his/her overall statutory responsibilities, the
principal may delegate the performance of specific responsibilities to other staff members, including members of the special education needs team.

**Special education needs team**

Schools should establish a core team of teachers with responsibility for special educational needs. Members of this team should have the necessary experience and ongoing access to professional development to support the diverse needs of students. A special education needs team helps ensure that those students with the greatest level of need have access to support from teachers with the necessary experience and expertise. The guidance counsellor should be a member of this team to help in promoting the inclusion of students with special educational needs.

The role of the special education needs team could include developing, implementing and monitoring a whole-school approach to the education of students with special educational needs. This would involve developing whole-school procedures for the selection of students for supplementary teaching, assisting in the implementation of whole-school strategies to enhance teaching and learning, and providing guidance to colleagues on the implementation of students’ support plans.

A member of the special education needs team might be assigned the responsibility for co-ordinating overall provision for special educational needs within the school and might assume responsibility for:

- Co-ordinating data gathering, screening and testing
- Transition planning for students with special educational needs
- Taking a lead role in making arrangements for planning, implementation and review of student support plans
- Supporting the communication of information regarding students’ needs to subject teachers, form tutors and year-heads
- Liaising with other agencies, NEPS and allied health professionals
- Liaising with parents and students

The core team will work closely with subject teachers, parents and with other support structures within the school, such as the student support team and guidance counsellor. In addition, the
core team can provide invaluable support to subject teachers to meet student needs within their classroom and subject areas.

Inclusion for students with Special Educational Needs Post Primary Guidelines p 67 – p 84


Parental engagement

Good parental engagement is a critical factor in enhancing outcomes for students with special educational needs. This is recognised by schools and is seen in the many good practices and initiatives they use to promote parental involvement. Parental engagement is enhanced when parents are consulted in relation to their children’s needs and strengths, on the supports and strategies being developed to support their children, and when they are involved in regular reviews of progress. The Continuum of Support process and use of the Student Support File provide valuable opportunities to engage with parents and to build a collaborative approach to identifying and responding to the needs of students with special educational needs.

In addition to consultation around the individual needs of their child, parents also value receiving good information on the nature and type of the special educational needs provision available in the school. Schools should consult with parents when developing and reviewing polices relating to the education of children with special educational needs. This helps to ensure that parents understand the school’s approaches and better enables them to support their children in transitioning through the school.

Appendix 7 sets out some key questions schools can use when reflecting on and reviewing their existing practice in promoting parental engagement.

Student engagement

Good engagement and participation in their own education has many associated benefits for students. This is particularly important for students with special educational needs and can help enhance their academic and social and emotional outcomes.
Engagement is enhanced when schools listen to and build on students’ interests, aspirations and strengths when developing educational interventions. This involves actively including students in a shared assessment for learning process, setting shared learning objectives, and jointly reviewing progress. Student participation is supported through teaching that is responsive to the personal needs of the learner, and is further enhanced by structuring and pacing learning experiences that are challenging, engaging and enjoyable. The Student Support File offers a useful framework for promoting student engagement and participation at all stages of educational planning and review.

At the whole-school level, schools are encouraged to review their approaches to student engagement and participation so that all students, including those with special educational needs, have opportunities to share their views on issues that affect them in school, and so contribute to reviews of relevant policies and practices in schools. The resources below can be used to support student engagement.

**My Thoughts about School (See page 30 Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools: Resource Pack for Teachers)**


See worksheets in Belonging Plus+ Transition and Transfer Programme (NBSS)


**Engagement with external bodies and agencies**

Support and guidance is available to teachers from external bodies and agencies such as the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), Special Education Needs Organisers (SENO), the NCSE Support Service, the Inspectorate and allied health professionals. It is important that schools have established procedures / protocols for liaising with these services and bodies in order to optimise the quality of provision for students with special educational needs at the individual, group or whole-school level. This is especially important for those students with more significant and enduring needs who benefit from a multi-disciplinary approach to the identification of need and the development of interventions.
The needs of many students span both health and education services. Health services (HSE and HSE-funded services) will continue to play an important role in early identification, assessment and diagnosis, intervention and review for students with special educational needs. It is important that schools are familiar with the range of health services in their locality, including referral pathways. Co-ordination is enhanced when schools liaise with and contribute to health-led assessment and delivery of interventions and when they facilitate meetings between parents and various support services. Schools should endeavour to incorporate relevant recommendations from health professionals in developing support plans at each level of the Continuum of Support.

**Transitions**

Transitions can be particularly challenging for all students and can pose even greater levels of challenge for students with special educational needs. Good planning and support for transition helps to ensure the successful transfer of students from primary to post-primary school and from post-primary school to further education settings. Many primary and post-primary schools already have excellent practices in place to support students at various transitional points. For example, a designated teacher from the post-primary school may visit the primary school to discuss issues and share information around transitioning to post-primary schools. In many instances, a member of the special education needs team and/or year head may contact parents of students with special educational needs prior to transitioning to post-primary school.

Many post-primary schools organise open days for their incoming students and their parents. Providing specific information, including details of the physical layout of schools, teacher roles, timetables, lockers, curriculum, school policies and procedures and extra-curricular activities can be particularly supportive for students with special educational needs. Specific induction activities during the first weeks of term facilitated by peer mentors, are particularly important for students with special educational needs. Organising ‘meet and greet’ sessions for parents during the first term of first-year provides parents with an important forum to share information and a basis on which to build relationships. Additionally, many schools organise information meetings at the start of the academic year to facilitate the sharing of relevant information regarding each student’s special educational needs with subject teachers.

Transition planning is also important to prepare students for further education settings. For students with more enduring needs, it is essential to engage in this planning process well in
advance of transfer. This will usually involve consultation with the student, their parents and relevant external professionals.

A number of resources are available to support schools in planning for effective transitions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs to Make Successful Transitions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/02156-NCSE-2016-Changing-Schools-Post-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>primarytoPost-final-08.02.16.pdf</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/5-NCSE-2016-Supporting-Students-final-">http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/5-NCSE-2016-Supporting-Students-final-</a></td>
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<td>web-27.01.16.pdf</td>
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<td><a href="http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/4-NCSE-2016-Life-After-School-final-">http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/4-NCSE-2016-Life-After-School-final-</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>web-27.01.16.pdf</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education Passport</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Post-primary_Education/Post-primary-Education/Assessment/Report_Card_Templates/transfer/">www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Post-primary_Education/Post-primary-Education/Assessment/Report_Card_Templates/transfer/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer from Primary to Post-Primary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Booklet</td>
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<tr>
<td>NBSS Transition and Transfer Programme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Continuing professional development (CPD)**

Research has consistently shown that the quality of teaching is the most critical factor in enhancing students’ learning and educational experiences. The revised allocation model provides more stability in staffing levels. This can enhance capacity within schools to support students with special educational needs. Since all teachers have responsibility for teaching students with special educational needs, it is important that all staff members engage in appropriate CPD to develop the capacity of schools to meet the educational needs of all students.

Schools should regularly review their ongoing professional development needs with reference to the provision of quality teaching and learning in both the mainstream classroom and special
education settings. Educational leaders should consider their own training needs in order to develop an inclusive whole-school approach to special educational needs provision. Schools can use the self-reflective questionnaire (Appendix 6) and other audit instruments (see CPD audit tool below) to review their professional development needs and to plan suitable training initiatives. It is also beneficial for teachers to become involved in local professional networks (within the school itself and with other schools) where good special educational needs practice and disability awareness can be shared and promoted. The links below can be used to access supports from the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), the Special Education Support Service (SESS) and, where available the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS). Support from NEPS is progressed through the regular school planning process with the assigned NEPS psychologist.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PDST</th>
<th>SESS</th>
<th>NBSS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.pdst.ie/sse/p">http://www.pdst.ie/sse/p</a></td>
<td><a href="http://www.sess.ie/support">http://www.sess.ie/support</a></td>
<td><a href="https://www.nbss.ie">https://www.nbss.ie</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JCT Support team for Level 2 Learning Programmes</td>
<td>CPD Audit Tool</td>
<td>NEPS</td>
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<td></td>
<td>SESS leading on Inclusion</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 1: Target-setting as part of the problem-solving framework

How do we evaluate targets?
- Standardised tests
- Screening tests
- Observations
- Interviews
- Teacher measures
- Check lists
- Consultation
- Ratings

Evaluation of student’s response to targets informs the next step of the problem-solving cycle

What data can help us set targets?
- Standardised tests
- Screening tests
- Observations
- Interviews
- Teacher measures
- Check lists
- Consultation
- Ratings

Targets are written as desired skills which are:
- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Relevant
- Time Limited

Targets should be expressed in definitive language to facilitate monitoring and review of progress.

What informs targets?
- Standardised tests
- Screening tests
- Observations
- Interviews
- Teacher measures
- Check lists
- Consultation
- Ratings

How can we help?
- Planning and Intervention

Did it work?
- Review

Why is it happening?
- Information gathering and assessment

What is the concern?
- Starting Point
Appendix 2: School provision plan for students with special educational needs

School: __________________________________________    Roll No: ________________

School Year: ______________      Reviewed: ________________

Special Educational Needs Teaching: __________ hours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Name:</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Brief description of role and duties</th>
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<tbody>
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</table>
Whole-School/Support for All:
Outline interventions delivered at whole-school level to support and promote positive student behaviour and learning for All

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Group</th>
<th>Description of Identified Need</th>
<th>Nature of Supports</th>
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Students with special educational needs who are in receipt of interventions through the Continuum of Support Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Support/for Some</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Name</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Support Plus/for a Few</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Name</td>
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</table>
Appendix 3: Case study from pilot project

School Context

This school is a community college, operating under the local Education and Training Board. It is based in a large town and caters for 344 students enrolled from a mixture of 20 urban and rural primary schools. It has 36 teachers and 2 SNAs on the staff.

Step 1:
Identification of students with special educational needs

Since 2013, assessment strategies in this school involved assessing students’ literacy and numeracy skills on standardised tests, analysis of students’ 6th class reports and teacher observations. On average 30% of students attained below STen 3 in numeracy and literacy. A number of first-year students with significant needs did not have professional reports. Participation in the pilot provided the school with greater scope to ‘look beyond’ professional assessment and to focus on actual learning needs as opposed to diagnosis. This enabled the school to address aspects that were not previously assessed, such as students’ skill development in Mathematics.

Step 2:
Setting learning targets

Through participation in the pilot, the school became aware of the advantages of using the Continuum of Support and Student Support File as a means of recording students’ learning targets and of tracking their progress in meeting these targets. The Continuum of Support enabled the school to bring a whole-school approach to the process of target-setting.

Step 3:
Planning teaching methods and approaches

Overall, the school found that participation in the pilot allowed it to respond in a more immediate way to the range of student needs. In an effort to build whole-staff capacity, the school developed and implemented its own approach to Assessment for Learning (AfL). As part of this, teachers agreed on ten assessment strategies and requested that all staff experiment with these. In their reflections at the end of the pilot, teachers reported that they saw evidence of this having a positive impact on teaching and learning.

The school also used some of its resources to engage in team-teaching. What was most beneficial about this approach was that it enabled all students in the class to participate, whereas in a more traditional mixed-ability English class, many of these students with special educational needs may have participated less.

Finally, in the teaching of Mathematics the school used some of its teaching resources to provide targeted intervention for a small group of students with particular difficulties in this area.
Step 4: 
Organising early intervention and prevention programmes

In order to support incoming first-year students, the school put a student support team in place. This team viewed transition to first-year as a process and was charged with overseeing the early intervention and transition programme for incoming first years. The team met weekly and sought to identify the learning needs of incoming students and to implement strategies, track and collect data (both hard and soft data) and evaluate the students’ progress. In terms of devising learning priorities, the support team adopted a broad holistic approach and considered social, emotional and behavioural issues as well as learning needs.

Step 5: 
Organising and deploying teaching resources

In its approach to timetabling, the school prioritised its provision for students with special educational needs. This was done prior to allocating other teachers and classes and facilitated the development of a core team for special educational needs.

Participation in the pilot project highlighted the need for the school to build a core team of special education teachers. This has now become a priority for the school and the model provided more flexibility to do this.

Step 6: 
Tracking, recording and reviewing progress

Participation in the pilot project facilitated the school in looking at its system of planning, tracking and recording for students with special educational needs, especially students without professional assessments. As a result of their learning during the pilot, teachers worked on a new whole-school approach to planning, tracking and recording progress. During the pilot they found that the reassessment of students at the end of a unit of work or a specific intervention had enabled them to measure progress in a real way. They also found that the use of assessment data to inform learning plans made the process more meaningful for teachers, parents and students.
Appendix 4: Guidelines for Irish-medium\(^5\) post-primary schools to support the implementation of the revised allocation model.

The Context

Irish-medium education should provide for the needs of all students including those with special educational needs. Students from various linguistic backgrounds attend Irish-medium schools located in both Gaeltacht and non-Gaeltacht areas. There are different linguistic contexts both inside and outside of Gaeltacht areas, and inside and outside of every class in Irish-medium schools and in schools located in the Gaeltacht. These backgrounds should be recognised by schools and taken into account as supports are allocated. Schools should be mindful that, in the context of Irish-medium education, the development of student proficiency in both Irish and English literacy should be addressed in accordance with students’ educational needs, as appropriate.

Where special educational needs in Irish are identified, schools are advised to provide supports in Irish so that students can access the entire curriculum (apart from English and foreign languages) through the medium of Irish. It is also advised that Irish-medium schools raise awareness among parents of the advantages of immersion education and of the importance of providing supports in the language of the school.

To support the implementation of the revised allocation model, Irish-medium schools should consider the following issues:

- Schools are reminded that, in the context of Irish-medium education, special educational needs in either or both languages should be identified and addressed.

- Schools should revise their assessment and special education policies to identify students’ educational needs in Irish, English and Mathematics on the appropriate standardised tests. Results from these tests should be used by the school to identify needs and to guide the resources allocation process appropriately.

- Effective communication and engagement with parents are vitally important in moving towards a needs-based approach to the allocation of additional teaching resources. Accordingly, teachers providing support to students with special educational needs in Irish-medium schools should aim to be sufficiently fluent in Irish to be able to consult effectively with parents through the medium of Irish in relation to their child’s needs and approaches to intervention, and to involve them in regular reviews of progress. The role of the special education teacher in a Gaeltacht context may also involve liaising with local primary schools and other agencies through the medium of Irish.

- Teachers in Irish-medium schools are advised to acquire the necessary proficiency in spoken and written Irish to enable them to assess students’ needs, to set targets and to decide

\(^5\) The term Irish-medium is used in this appendix to denote both Gaelcholáistí and post-primary schools in the Gaeltacht.
on the most appropriate interventions and monitor and make a record of the progress of first-language speakers of Irish and learners with special educational needs through the medium of Irish; to provide in-class support through the medium of Irish and to enable them to seek and share information with the entire school staff through the medium of Irish.

- In developing their whole-school approaches to literacy, schools should consider both the social language and academic language needs of the student.

- Schools are advised to provide supports in Irish so that students can mediate the curriculum through Irish. It is considered good practice to provide support in Irish (the language of the school) and that special education teaching be delivered mostly through Irish.

- In the context of Irish-medium education, teachers could consider Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in the teaching of every subject: this would mean that Irish and the curricular subject could be taught simultaneously.

- All teachers in Irish-medium schools are encouraged, as required, to avail of tailored language education resource materials made available through An Chomhairle um Oideachais Gaeltachta agus Gaelscoileanna (COGG).

- Irish-medium schools should communicate and collaborate at local level to identify their continuing professional development needs in special education. These needs should be discussed with the support services with a view to accessing training and identifying and sharing best practice.

DES Circular 0014/2017, on Special Education Teaching Allocation, notes that in Irish-language schools the support provided for pupils by schools to assist with students’ literacy development may be conducted in Irish or English, or a combination of both, as considered necessary by the school.
### Examples of resources which may be useful in Irish-medium post-primary schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Website</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resource Pack (Continuum of Support)</td>
<td><a href="https://www.education.ie/ga/Scoileanna-Col%C3%A1isti/Seirbh%C3%ADs%C3%AD/An-tSeirbh%C3%ADs-N%C3%A1isi%C3%BAnta-Siceolaiochta-Oideachais-NEPS-/Acmhainni-Foilseachain.html">https://www.education.ie/ga/Scoileanna-Coláisti/Seirbhísí/An-tSeirbhís-Náisiúnta-Siceolaiochta-Oideachais-NEPS-/Acmhainni-Foilseachain.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td><a href="http://www.maradearfa.ie/">http://www.maradearfa.ie/</a></td>
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<td><a href="https://www.stmarys-belfast.ac.uk/aisaonad/Fonaic/Fonaic_na_Gaeilge.html">https://www.stmarys-belfast.ac.uk/aisaonad/Fonaic/Fonaic_na_Gaeilge.html</a></td>
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Appendix 5: Looking at our school 2016 – A quality framework for post-primary schools

Schools may find the following standards from the teaching and learning dimension of the quality framework particularly helpful in providing for students with special educational needs.

**Domain: Learner Experiences**

**All students should be enabled to:**

- Engage purposefully in meaningful learning activities
- Grow as learners through respectful interactions and experiences that are challenging and supportive
- Reflect on their progress as learners and develop a sense of ownership of and responsibility for their learning
- Experience opportunities to develop the skills and attitudes necessary for lifelong learning

**In order to achieve this, all teachers should:**

- Plan for assessing students’ attainment of the intended learning objectives of the lesson, or series of lessons, using both assessment of learning and assessment for learning
- Maintain assessment records that are clear, useful and easy to interpret and share
- Meaningfully differentiate content and activities in order to cater for the varying needs and abilities of students
Appendix 6: Self-reflective questionnaire

Better Services, Better Outcomes for Students with Special Educational Needs

Self-Reflective Questionnaire

This questionnaire is provided as a resource to schools for the revised allocation model. The self-reflective questionnaire is designed to help schools and teachers to address the following questions outlined in these Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools:

- How can we identify students’ needs?
- How can we meet students’ needs?
- How can we monitor and report on progress?
- How can our school allocate its resources to effectively meet needs?
- How can our school plan at whole-school level to ensure effective provision for students with special educational needs?

The questionnaire is intended for use by the school itself and should be used as a dynamic, developmental document to inform implementation of the revised allocation model in schools. Ideally, the questionnaire should be completed collaboratively within the school and the questionnaire itself should serve as a stimulus for reflection and discussion. The prompt questions in the questionnaire encourage teachers to examine their existing practices and to identify any changes needed to implement the revised allocation model. Schools may also wish to use or modify the questionnaire to review their special educational needs policies or to evaluate their progress in implementing the allocation model. Schools will not be required to submit the questionnaire to the Department or any of its agencies.
**How can we identify students’ needs?**

How do we use the Continuum of Support and Student Support Files to provide a documented and staged-approach to identifying students’ needs?

- Do we consider individual needs across a broad range, including academic, social, communication, emotional, and behavioural?
- Do we identify environmental and contextual issues which need modification (visual, hearing, physical, sensory)?
- How often are support plans developed and reviewed and who should be involved in this process?

How do we gather the information we need to inform our decision making so that we can provide the greatest level of support to those with the greatest needs?

- How well do we gather and use information from primary schools to ensure continuity in provision following transfer?
- What observational records help us with identifying needs?
- What types of assessment help us with screening and identification of needs?
- How do we integrate information from students, parents, external professionals to assist with identification of needs?

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<th>What are our strengths?</th>
<th>What are our areas for improvement?</th>
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**How can we improve?**
How can we meet needs?

What steps are subject teachers taking to exercise their primary responsibility for the learning and well-being of all students in their classes?

- Are all teachers using a variety of teaching approaches in response to diverse needs?
- What strategies are employed at class level to overcome barriers to learning and participation?
- How is learning broken down into logical and manageable steps to ensure appropriate learning challenges for all?
- To what extent are lessons co-operative, collaborative and hands-on?
- Are there any standards or statements of good practice from Looking at Our Schools 2016 which would be useful in providing for better learning experiences and outcomes for our students?

How do our special education teachers and subject teachers collaborate to meet the needs of students and to ensure their progress?

- Do we use early-intervention programmes in our school?
- How do special education teachers support subject teachers with in-class supports, group and individual withdrawal?
- How do all staff work together to support students with social, emotional and behavioural needs?

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How can we improve?

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How can we monitor and report on progress?

Are we using a cyclical problem-solving approach to planning, teaching and review which results in the devising of clear targets relevant to our students’ priority learning needs?

- How do we set targets and devise support plans for our students which identify needs and which can be monitored and recorded?
- How do we ensure that subject teachers have access to support plans for the purpose of differentiating their subject teaching to support students with special educational needs?
- How can we assess the effectiveness of programmes / interventions we use?
- How do we monitor at group, class and whole-school level?
- Can we innovate and extend our practices?

Who do we consult with and what is involved in monitoring the outcomes/progress?

- How do we involve parents and students in monitoring progress?
- How do we communicate the progress our students have made?

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How can we improve?
How can our school allocate its resources to effectively meet needs?

How do we identify the needs of all students with special educational needs in the school and use the Continuum of Support approach to ensure that the greatest level of support is provided to students with the greatest needs?

- Could we quantify and organise our support for students with special educational needs through use of the School Provision Plan (Appendix 2)?
- When devising support plans, how do we use the Continuum to identify priority learning needs at School Support and School Support Plus levels?
- What kind of approaches and interventions are we using at a whole-school level to support early-intervention and prevention?

How can we best decide on roles and responsibilities in providing supports for students, monitoring progress and contributing to future plans for the students?

- How can we merge the existing responsibilities of the resource and learning support teachers into a special education team approach?
- Can we timetable and co-ordinate interventions efficiently with reference to:
  - available resources (in-class approaches, group work and minimal individual withdrawal)?
  - continuity of support (avoiding a student having several different teachers)?
  - the particular needs of students?
  - Strategic pairing of subjects on the timetable (for example, pairing literacy, numeracy and practical subjects opposite more academic subjects) in order to provide students with mild/moderate disabilities with more opportunities to reinforce their learning in core subjects

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How can we improve?
### How can our school plan at whole-school level to ensure effective provision for students with special educational needs?

How do we plan at whole-school level to meet the needs of students with special educational needs?

- How do we foster an inclusive approach to address the diversity of needs in our school?
- Have we reviewed our ongoing professional development needs with reference to quality teaching and learning in both the mainstream classroom and special education support settings?
- How do we consult with parents in relation to the supports and strategies being used in our school?
- How do we foster student engagement and participation in their learning and in the life of the school?
- How can we support student connectedness with their school, teachers and peers?
- Have we established procedures / protocols for liaising with support services?
- How can we establish a special educational needs team to help co-ordinate supports?
- How can we support the effective transition of students into our school and later to other education settings?

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### What are our strengths?

### What are our areas for improvement?

### How can we improve?
Appendix 7: Parental involvement

In reflecting on and reviewing a school’s existing practice in encouraging parental involvement the following questions could be considered, both in terms of existing and future actions:

- How are parents consulted and informed about the nature of special education needs provision and policy in our school?
- How are parents consulted when special education supports (for example, Whole-school/Support for All, School Support/for Some and School Support Plus/for a Few) are being proposed for their child?
- Do we involve parents at each level of the Continuum of Support process?
- To what extent is regular communication facilitated with parents who have a child with a special educational need?
- What barriers might prevent parents from being fully involved in supporting their child in school? What may be helpful in overcoming these barriers?
- Do we provide opportunities for parents to learn more about special education issues through contact with other agencies and services?
- How can we support staff members in engaging effectively with parents?
## Resource Documents

**The following resources may be particularly helpful to post-primary schools**

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<th>Effective Interventions for Struggling Readers:</th>
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<th>A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Teachers &amp; Resource Pack for Teachers</th>
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<td>For a leaflet outlining how to support students in post-primary schools:</td>
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<td>Student Support Teams in Post Primary Schools</td>
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<td><a href="www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/Student-Support-Teams-in-Post-Primary-Schools.pdf">link</a></td>
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<th>Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs: Post-Primary Guide</th>
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<th>Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools</th>
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<tr>
<td><a href="www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Well_Being_PP_Schools_Guidelines.pdf">link</a></td>
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<tr>
<th>Guidelines on the Individual Education Plan Process</th>
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Student Support File
www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/Student-Support-File-Form.docx

Circular 70/2014

Signposts

Metacognition in the classroom – webcast and resource
www.sess.ie/welcome-sess-elearning
Book Borrowing Online Facility

www.sess.ie/sess-book-borrowing

Circular 0034/2015 Assessment Instruments (including tests and web-based resources) approved for guidance and / or learning support in post-primary schools from May 2015 until further notice


The following is an example of the range of information and resources available from the National Behaviour Support Service. Additional information and resources can be found at www.nbss.ie.

Our Work In Schools gives an overview of the work of the National Behaviour Support Service and the interventions, projects and initiatives schools implement in the areas of (a) Behaviour for Learning (b) Social & Emotional Literacy (c) Literacy, Language and Learning and (d) Wellbeing.

https://www.nbss.ie/publications-categories/research-guidelines-articles
**NBSS Level 1 Guidelines** looks at how to establish school-wide systems of support and develop a common approach to creating a safe, positive and effective learning environment for all learners.

[https://www.nbss.ie/model-of-support](https://www.nbss.ie/model-of-support)

**Learning Environment Checklist** is designed to help teachers identify the areas within the school environment where behaviour may be causing concern. It covers a range of factors that may be influencing students’ behaviour including whole school policies, physical environment, classroom organisation and individual teaching and learning approaches and strategies.


**Positive Behaviour Strategies** handout contains practical strategies for dealing with frequent low-to-medium level disruption.

[https://www.nbss.ie/publications-categories/behaviour-for-learning-resources-publications](https://www.nbss.ie/publications-categories/behaviour-for-learning-resources-publications)
NBSS Academic Literacy & Language Support provides a list of interventions and resources to develop key literacy, language and learning skills and strategies with class, group and individual students.

https://www.nbss.ie/publications-categories/literacy-language-learning-resources-publications

https://www.nbss.ie/nbss-model-of-support/level-1-school-wide-support-for-all-students/literacy-learning-wellbeing