

OPENING STATEMENT TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND SKILLS
on the
STATUS OF NON-TEACHING STAFF IN SCHOOLS

Department of Education and Skills
9th April 2019

Introduction

I would like to thank the Committee for the invitation to meet today to discuss the status of non-teaching staff in schools.

In general terms non-teaching staff in schools fall into three main categories, as follows:

- (i) Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)
- (ii) Secretaries, Caretakers and Cleaners
- (iii) School Bus Escorts

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) recognises and values the work of these non-teaching staff and the supports they provide in helping to ensure the continued successful education of the pupils in each learning environment, and the efficient operation of the school.

SPECIAL NEEDS ASSISTANTS

The SNA scheme is designed to provide schools with additional adult support staff who can assist children with special educational needs who also have additional and significant care needs. SNAs are recruited specifically to assist in the care needs of pupils with disabilities in an educational context. SNAs therefore do not have a teaching/pedagogical role.

There are approximately 15,000 SNAs in schools nationally, supporting in the region of 36,000 pupils. SNAs employed in recognised primary, voluntary secondary and community and comprehensive schools are paid by the Departments' payroll section.

The NCSE is responsible, through its network of local Special Education Needs Organisers (SENO) for allocating SNAs to schools to support children with additional care needs, in accordance with DES criteria, including a requirement to have regard to the overall limit on staffing numbers under the Employment Control Framework.

SNAs are not allocated to individual pupils but to schools, as a school based resource, in the same manner that teachers are allocated to schools. SNA duties are assigned at the discretion of the Principal, or another person acting on behalf of the Principal, and/or the Board of Management of a school or ETB.

SECRETARIES, CARETAKERS AND CLEANERS

There are 3,246 primary schools and 715 second level schools in the State. The majority of primary and voluntary secondary schools in the Free Education Scheme now receive grant assistance to provide for caretaking and/or secretarial services. This model enables the support to be spread more widely, and ultimately cover all primary and secondary schools with funding for such services.

Within the grant schemes, the level and extent of services provided is a matter for the school authorities who, through the discretion afforded under the scheme, apply diverse arrangements for secretarial and caretaking services as resources permit and as their local needs mandate.

In May 2015 under a Chairman's Note to the Lansdowne Road Agreement, it was agreed that the Department of Education and Skills would engage with the union side in relation to issues around grant-funded school secretaries and caretakers.

This resulted in an agreed arbitration process at the Workplace Relations Commission in 2015. The Arbitrator recommended a cumulative pay increase of 10% between 2016 and 2019 for staff and that a minimum hourly pay rate of €13 be phased in over that period. The Arbitrator's recommendations were accepted by both sides and all agreed measures have now been implemented. The final 2.5% increase and floor hourly rate increase to €13 per hour was paid on 1 January 2019. The agreement covers the period up to 31 December 2019.

SCHOOL BUS ESCORTS

There is a facility within the Special Educational Needs Transport Scheme for the appointment of a School Bus Escort where a child's care and safety needs while on school transport are such as to require the support of an Escort. While the Department sanctions the appointment of the Bus Escort, the school employs the Escort, and this appointment is grant funded by the Department.