



Circular No. 0042/2011

Circular to the Boards of Management and Principal Teachers of Special Schools

Staffing Arrangements in Special Schools

1. Purpose of Circular

The purpose of this circular is to advise special schools of the staffing arrangements which will apply for the coming 2011/12 school year and of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) intention to adopt revised annual staffing arrangements as from the 2012/13 school year, based on updated pupil profiles each year.

This circular should be read in conjunction with Circular 0038/2010 *Staffing Arrangements for Special Schools and the role of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE)*, which set out the role of the NCSE in allocating staff to special schools. Schools should also refer to Circular 30/2011 *Arrangements for the 2011/12 School Year in Relation to Learning Support/Resource Teaching Posts*.

Circular 0038/2010 had indicated that discussions would take place with representatives of the CPSMA, NABMSE, INTO and the National Parents Council (Primary) on future staffing arrangements for special schools. This process has now been completed

2. Staffing Arrangements 2011/12

(i) Teaching Staff

The data available to the NCSE indicates that there is a surplus of teaching posts across the special school sector. However, on a concessionary basis, the current teaching staff levels will be retained in Special Schools for the 2011/12 school year at existing levels, subject to the following conditions:

Some schools have a small number of excess teacher posts. In the case of these schools, the DES will, for the 2011/12 school year, authorise the NCSE not to suppress class teacher posts except where teachers are leaving such posts through retirement. This concession is conditional on schools being prepared to enrol further pupils with similar special educational needs to their existing pupil cohorts during the course of the school year on referral from the SENO. It is expected that any school with places available will enrol other pupils with similar special educational needs. Special schools should continue to liaise with their SENO to make them aware of placement availability in their schools.

In relation to special schools with expanding pupil numbers who require additional teaching posts due to pupil growth, should additional posts be required in such schools this year, they will have to met either from the current redeployment of surplus permanent teachers panels or by reductions in the special school system.

There are a small number of schools which have significant excess teacher posts. The NCSE may therefore contact these schools to review the individual circumstances in these schools and may suppress a post in such schools in order to create a post in a school elsewhere. Given that there is an overall excess of teaching posts within the special school system, no additional new posts may be allocated across the special school system and any additionally for schools must be met from overall existing resources.

(ii) Special Needs Assistants

In order for the NCSE to complete the processing of applications for mainstream schools in the first instance, the existing 2010/11 level of SNA supports will initially be rolled over in special schools for the coming school year, other than for schools with declining enrolments, with a review to take place in the Autumn of the 11/12 school year. The review will also take into account the Policy Analysis and Value for Money Review of the SNA scheme and policy advice received from the NCSE on the future of Special Schools and Classes.

For the majority of special schools, the number of new entrants to the school will be broadly balanced by the number of school leavers and as such the existing level of SNA support in the school, other than for schools with declining enrolments, will be maintained pending a review early in the school year.

3. Staffing Arrangements from 2012/13

Special schools are currently staffed primarily on the basis of their official school designations, pupil numbers in the school, and teacher staffing ratios as set out in Circular 38/10.

It had emerged during the course of the NCSE SNA review that many special schools now enrol students from disability categories other than from those provided for by their existing school designations.

The DES has welcomed the fact that the many schools have expanded their remit to enrol pupils with a wide range of special needs, to meet the needs of their communities.

In the context of recent discussions on future staffing arrangements for special schools, and in order to establish a clear picture of current enrolment practices, all special schools recently provided information to the DES regarding the disability categories of all pupils presently enrolled in schools, and as to the disability categories of pupils which the school intends to enrol, or are willing to enrol, from September 2011.

This information has provided valuable clarity to the DES and the NCSE regarding the availability of special school places and the future enrolment intentions of schools. The DES appreciates the co operation of schools in completing this exercise. In order to bring greater visibility to the enrolment process and clarity to parents, special schools should now also ensure that their enrolment intentions are reflected in their school enrolment policies.

Staffing levels and pupil/teacher ratios should reflect the complexity of need that exists within individual schools and should not be solely determined by a special school's designation.

Special schools, going forward, will be staffed based on their actual current pupil profiles and the disability category of each pupil, as opposed to primarily by school designation. School staffing schedules will be reviewed and updated each year by the NCSE.

The NCSE will collect up to date and precise details of pupils attending special schools. Revised staffing arrangements, based on pupil population as opposed to being based principally on school designation, will apply with effect from the 2012/13 school year.

4. Other issues relating to Circular 38/2010

This circular is intended to give clarity to special schools with regard to staff arrangements for the coming school year and to indicate the direction of staffing arrangements from the 2012/13 school year. A number of other issues in relation to special schools were considered in discussions with the Education Partners, which will be addressed through future communications, also taking into account the NCSE Policy Advice on the Future of Special Schools and Classes.

If you have any queries with regards to this circular please contact Special Education Unit on - 090-648 4166 / 4187

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

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