



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

## **Special Needs Assistant Allocation 2026/27**

### **1. Key Messages**

- **The NCSE will be publishing each school's initial SNA allocation for the 2026/27 in the coming days and it will be available to schools via the school portal.**
- **SNA posts will continue to be allocated on a needs basis.**
- **Any redeployment of posts where needs change will be for the 2027/28 school year.**
- **Where a surplus of SNAs is identified, there will be a limited reduction to 1 SNA post starting in the 2027/28 school year.**
- **The NCSE will continue to identify the care needs and where warranted no further reduction will be applied.**
- **No school with an existing allocation will see a reduction below a minimum of one post.**

## 2. Purpose of this Circular and background

The purpose of this Circular is to advise schools of arrangements for the allocation of special needs assistant (SNA) support to mainstream classes in primary and post primary schools for the 2026/27 school year.

The role of the special needs assistant (SNA) is to provide recognised primary, post-primary and special schools with additional adult support to facilitate the attendance, participation and inclusion in school of students with special educational care needs to enable them to achieve their full potential.

The aim of this circular is to provide certainty of SNA provision in mainstream classes for these students and their families, SNAs and schools, for the 2026/27 school year.

This circular also sets out arrangements for the review of SNA allocation to schools and the deployment of SNA resources within schools as part of a whole of school resource.

This circular should be read in conjunction with [Circular 0032/2026](#) on The Role of Special Needs Assistants in recognised Primary, Post-Primary and Special Schools and [Circular 0022/2026](#) on the SNA Redeployment Scheme as well as associated guidance documents and information published by the DEY from time to time.

It should not be assumed that all students who have special educational needs or who have been diagnosed as having a disability require access to SNA support. Full details regarding the NCSE allocation process are available at [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie) or through the local Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO).

To ensure the greatest level of transparency and fairness possible the NCSE publish details of all SNA allocations which are made to schools each year on their website at [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

### **3. The Role of the SNA**

The role of the SNA is set out in [DES Circular 0032/2026](#) The Role of Special Needs Assistants in recognised Primary, Post-Primary and Special Schools.

### **4. Role of Schools to Manage SNA Support**

SNAs should be deployed by schools in a manner which best meets the care needs of students in mainstream classes. It is a matter for each school to deploy SNA support to meet students need effectively by identifying and monitoring the care needs of all students in the school. This approach allows schools flexibility in how the available SNA support is utilised.

It is expected that schools will regularly review and reprioritise the deployment of SNAs within mainstream settings and allocate resources to ensure those with the greatest level of care need receive the greatest level of support. The approach taken should align with provisions in [Circular 0032/2026](#) - The Role of Special Needs Assistants in recognised primary, Post-Primary and Special 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.

SNA support should, at the principal's or teacher's direction, focus on meeting the particular care needs of the student/s as identified and recorded in the student support plan which should be monitored on an ongoing basis and modified accordingly.

#### **SNAs do not have a teaching/pedagogical role.**

The SNA role does not include teaching new concepts, skills or knowledge to students. This is the role of qualified teachers employed by the school.

## **5. Allocation Arrangements for 2026/27 School Year**

The NCSE will be publishing each school's initial SNA allocation for the 2026/27 in the coming days and it will be available to schools via the school portal.

## **6. NCSE SNA Reviews 2026/27**

The NCSE will continue to undertake SNA reviews during the 2026/27 school year. The reviews will be a holistic examination of the care needs in all settings within the continuum of provision in a school, so as to ensure that SNAs are allocated to those schools with students who have the greatest level of significant care needs.

All SNA posts in a school are subject to review, and the review will encompass the care needs of the student cohort along with a review of the approach to deployment of SNA support in the school to ensure it is appropriate and aligns with existing policy.

The following outlines some examples of additional factors (not exhaustive) that will be taken into account when reviews are being undertaken.

- Prioritisation of schools which have not had a recent SNA review.
- Students transitioning to special class or special school placements from mainstream, particularly from within that school.
- Schools who have established or are sanctioned to establish special classes.
- Changing demographics in the catchment area of the school,

This will enable the NCSE to continue to compile a real time analysis of SNA deployment across the education system and the requirement nationally for SNA support in schools.

Where a school identifies a significant increase in care needs, additional resources can be provided, following a request for review by the school to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).

In cases where schools consider they have a reduced level of care need and therefore the care needs of students in their school can be met from a reduced allocation, there will be a separate process administered through the NCSE. Schools should contact their local NCSE special educational needs organiser (SENO) to commence this process.

All SNA reviews when completed by the NCSE will result in one of the following outcomes:

- I. No change in the level of care need identified (and no change in the current SNA allocation)
- II. Increase in the level of care need identified (which, if significant, would result in an increase in the SNA allocations to that school)
- III. Decrease in the level of care need identified in the school (which, if significant, would result in a reduction in SNA allocations to that school as the care needs of the students could be appropriately supported with less resources than are currently allocated).

In relation to (iii) above, in cases where the NCSE identify a surplus of SNA resource(s) in a school due to changing care needs profile in that school.

- Any surplus resource identified will be discussed in detail with the school leadership team on completion of the review. This will ensure that all parties have a clear understanding and knowledge of the reasoning behind the identification of the surplus SNA resource.
- The NCSE will provide the school leadership with the detailed rationale which will enable them to address any concerns from school staff, parents/guardians and students themselves.

- Notwithstanding the provisions of the previous paragraph, in cases where the NCSE identify a substantial change in the care need profile of any given school any proposed reduction will be limited to a maximum of 1 SNA post. This will allow school leadership to make a seamless/gradual adjustment to the deployment of SNA support in the school in line with the student support planning process.
- In addition, the NCSE will maintain close contact with the school leadership from the start of the 2027/28 school year to ensure that the change has not impacted pupils.
- No further reduction will be applied in subsequent years where the NCSE identifies that the care needs profile has increased in the school to a level that warrants the retention of the post(s).
- However, in cases where the surplus identified is greater than one post and the school leadership team agrees that a reduction greater than one post should be applied for the 2027/28 school year, the NCSE can proceed with this additional reduction.
- Where a school has an existing SNA allocation and a SNA review identifies a surplus in that school, that school's allocation will not be reduced below one SNA post.
- The NCSE will provide support to the school on the correct approach to deployment and application of their SNA resources to ensure the care needs of their students are met effectively.

The NCSE has published [SNA Review Guidelines](#) for schools which are available via the NCSE website.

## **7. Appeal of the outcome of the SNA Review**

The NCSE has developed an appeal mechanism for schools that are not satisfied with the outcome of the SNA Review. Local special educational needs organisers (SENOs) will provide information and clarification to schools on the outcome where requested.

In processing appeals, the NCSE will ensure that the appeal is dealt with by an official (appeals officer) who was not involved in the SNA Review decision. The appeals officer is tasked with reviewing the information on which the SNA Review decision was made. When the appeal is complete, the outcome will be communicated to the school in writing by email. Detailed information on the SNA appeals process and grounds for appeal is published on the NCSE website [SNA Review Guidelines](#)

## **8. Independent Examination of the Appeal Process**

Where a school is not satisfied with the outcome of the appeal on the basis that the process was not followed, it can refer the matter to the Appeals Advisory Committee (AAC) which comprises an independent chairperson, a representative of school management bodies and a parent representative. The decision of the AAC is final.

Further information on this process is available on the NCSE website in the [SNA Review Guidelines](#)

## **9. SNA Redeployment scheme**

The SNA Redeployment Scheme will facilitate an eligible SNA who is in a standard post which arising from a SNA review is no longer required to be redeployed to a school that has a vacant post.

The SNA Redeployment Scheme is designed to ensure that experienced SNAs are retained in schools, maintaining capacity in the SNA workforce and enhancing the service to students with special educational needs.

Full details of the SNA redeployment scheme are contained in [Circular 0022/2026](#) Special Needs Assistants Redeployment Scheme and the supporting guidance document.

## **10. Supports available to schools and SNAs.**

### **Schools supports**

The NCSE will host a series of webinars on the SNA Review process to support primary, post primary and special schools. To facilitate teaching principals and others the webinars will be delivered at various times during the month of October. It has been recognised that teaching principals have different administrative days, so several session options are available throughout the month. Webinars will be held for primary and post primary mainstream schools. In addition, webinars suited to the specific support needs of special school will also be held. NCSE is also developing a parental guide to support parents understanding of the different elements of a review to support parents understanding of the range of supports available in school suited to their child's specific needs.

The NCSE provides a comprehensive programme of teacher professional development seminars each academic year covering a variety of special educational needs topics and includes training in the deployment of SNA support. Schools are encouraged to identify their training needs each academic year and access NCSE TPL seminars which have been developed to address the unique training needs of principals and teachers working with students with special educational needs. The full range of NCSE TPL support can be found at <https://ncse.ie/tp>

The NCSE provide a toolkit for schools to assist in the review, reprioritisation and deployment of SNA support. The toolkit is available at the following link [SNA Review](#)

[\(Mainstream\) – National Council for Special Education – Working to deliver a better special education service .](#)

The NCSE's SNA Toolkit is based on the continuum of support and contains templates aligned to the Student Support Plan which supports schools in the process of planning'

In addition, the NCSE's team of SENOs is available to schools to provide support and advice in relation to the deployment of SNA support and the role of the SNA.

### **SNA Supports**

- SNAs can avail of the SNA redeployment scheme or
- SNAs can avail of the supplementary assignment arrangements outlined in Circular 0043/2025
- SNAs may be eligible for redundancy in accordance with Circular 58/2006, Queries in relation to redundancy can be submitted through the following link: <https://cs.education.gov.ie/>
- SNA can access The Spectrum Life Employee Assistance Service (EAS) which is a free and confidential mental health support service that provides wellbeing support to SNAs as part of the Department of Education's Wellbeing Together / Folláine le Cheile Wellbeing Programme.

## **11. Communications**

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) will publish each school's SNA allocation for the upcoming school year on their website in the coming days.

The NCSE have also published guidelines for schools outlining both the review process and relevant timelines for 2026/27 school year. Details available at the [SNA Review Guidelines](#)

**Special Education**

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