



0063/2026

**To: Patron bodies, Managerial Authorities, Principals and Teachers of  
Recognised Primary, Secondary, Community and Comprehensive Schools,  
Special Schools and  
The Chief Executives of Education and Training Boards.**

**Title: National Council for Special Education Parents Notify process to  
determine the level of need for special education places for the 2027/2028  
school year**

### **1. Summary of Circular**

The key aim of this Circular Letter is to outline how the Parents Notify process will operate ahead of the 2027/2028 school year.

Parents/guardians of children and young people seeking a special class or special school place for the 2027/2028 school year will be required to notify the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) by **1<sup>st</sup> September 2026** and to provide necessary documentation by **15<sup>th</sup> September 2026 or as soon as is reasonably practicable thereafter**.

The Department of Education and Youth ('the Department') and NCSE will have a targeted communication strategy to reach out to parents over the summer to advise of the Parent Notify process. The request at this point for school authorities is to assist with this communication strategy, where possible, by issuing a message to parents in their schools as an additional means of highlighting the process.

A reminder is also provided to schools in relation to the admissions policies for special classes and special schools. Specifically;

- Schools are reminded of the need to remove certain clauses from admissions policies that could prevent children and young people accessing these placements;
- Special schools are requested to ensure that all available places are filled in admissions processes and
- Schools are requested not to include a stipulation in an admissions policy that professional reports must be dated within the last two years.

### **2. Purpose and Context**

This Circular Letter replaces Circular Letter 0039/2025 in respect of the operation of the NCSE Parents Notify process in regard to the 2027/2028 school year. The Parents Notify process provides the NCSE and the Department with the information for the potential need for specialist placements in working with schools to forward plan for special education provision.



### 3. Strengthening forward planning through better data sharing and notification arrangements

All stakeholders, including parent representative bodies and advocacy groups, agree that the earlier the NCSE is aware of the level of need for special class and special school places in an area, the better in terms of forward planning.

Based on the information provided to the NCSE under the Parents Notify process, approximately 75% of all children/young people seeking a specialist placement for the 2026/2027 school year are already enrolled in school. While some will be transitioning from primary to post-primary, the majority already enrolled in school are not at these transition points. As in 2026, the children at key transition points and without a placement will be the priority category for support from the NCSE in 2027.

Where a child or young person is already enrolled in a particular school and is seeking a specialist placement in that school, the NCSE will determine a child's eligibility for a special class or school.

In addition, for these children, the NCSE will also require the most recent version of their student support plan. This will help to provide useful information on how a child or young person is supported in their current setting.

The NCSE routinely access student support plans as part of their support to schools. They will work with individual parents and schools on the provision of these, where necessary, when schools return in the Autumn.

Circular Letter 23/2025 reiterated the importance and need for student support plans as well as the need for these to reviewed and updated on a regular basis in the best interests of the children and young people concerned.

Parents/guardians are asked to notify the NCSE that a child or young person requires a special class or special school place for the 2027/2028 school year **by 1<sup>st</sup> September 2026 and to provide necessary documentation by 15<sup>th</sup> September 2026 or as soon as is reasonably practicable thereafter.**

The NCSE will continue to engage with parents/guardians and schools on this, to ensure all of the relevant information is provided as quickly as possible to facilitate comprehensive forward planning.

**Where parents/guardians are awaiting documentation or reports they should not delay contacting the NCSE via the Parents Notify portal by 1<sup>st</sup> September 2026. As above, documentation can be supplied as soon as practicable after initial notification has been made to the NCSE.**



It is particularly important that the NCSE and the Department have a clear indication of the level of need for the 2027/2028 school year.

Schools who receive applications for enrolment to a special class or special school should advise parents/guardians to notify the NCSE if they haven't already done so.

Parents/guardians can notify the NCSE via the Parents Notify system which is outlined on the NCSE website at <https://ncse.ie/notify-ncse-special-class-special-school>.

Parents/guardians who engage with the NCSE Parent's Notify process by 1<sup>st</sup> September 2026, having provided the necessary documentation by the 15<sup>th</sup> of September 2026, or as soon as practicable thereafter will be provided with a letter, dated for the relevant school year. This letter from the NCSE will confirm the outcome of the NCSE's review based on the supporting evidence provided. A letter of eligibility is provided by the NCSE where an applicant has the appropriate recommendation and documents for a special class or special school place.

This letter of eligibility should be forwarded to the school/s as part of their application for enrolment in a special class or special school. In circumstances where a child or young person did not take up a specialist placement in 2026, and the parent/guardian notifies the NCSE that such placement is sought again for the 2027/2028 school year, a new letter of eligibility will issue from the NCSE.

**Letters of eligibility apply only to the school year to which the notification to the NCSE refers.**

While a letter of eligibility can issue after the deadline of 15<sup>th</sup> of September 2026, it may affect an applicants' ability to comply with deadlines in respective of schools' admissions processes. That is why this Circular Letter invites parents/guardians to engage with the NCSE by 1<sup>st</sup> September 2026 and provide the necessary documentation and reports before 15<sup>th</sup> of September 2026 or as soon as practicable thereafter.

While the NCSE will work with the Department in relation to securing appropriate placements for children who present after the timelines, it will also continue to issue letters of eligibility to those who present thereafter. The NCSE will work closely to support those children and their families seeking specialist placements, as has been the case for the 26/27 year.

A dedicated communications strategy will also be developed by the NCSE to ensure that parents/guardians are aware of the requirement to notify the NCSE



when seeking a special class or special school placement. The NCSE has recently redesigned its website, which is aimed to be more accessible and user-friendly for parents/guardians wishing to access information and details in relation to special education provision in their local area.

### **Improvements to the Parents Notify portal**

The NCSE continues to review and adapt the Parents Notify online portal to ensure it is easily accessible and allows for data to be captured in a timely and accurate manner.

Parents/guardians should consult the NCSE for assistance with the information required to make a submission on the NCSE Parents Notify portal when seeking a letter of eligibility for a specialist placement. This includes the requirement to provide a child/young person's PPSN which acts as a unique identifier.

In addition, it is considered necessary for better forward planning to understand how children and young people, who are already in school settings, are currently being supported. This understanding will be significantly strengthened by the provision of additional information on a number of issues such as:

- Confirming each applicant's current setting and what setting is required, for example.
  - i. a child starting school,
  - ii. transitioning from primary to post-primary,
  - iii. seeking to move from mainstream to a special class or special school
- Confirming if a child or young person is seeking a special class place whilst remaining in their current school.

Parents/guardians are asked to provide this information when accessing the portal to assist in better forward planning. When accessing the portal initially, parents/guardians will be asked to confirm whether a child or young person is already attending school or starting school for the first time. Any information which the parent can provide for a child coming into school for the first time, as to the level of need, would also assist in this process.

### **Information on vacant places and expected leavers**

As more and more special classes and additional special school capacity has been provided over each of the last few years, it is expected that the annual movement of students:

- from primary special classes to post-primary special classes;



- from special classes to special schools;
- from special schools to special classes;
- from special classes to mainstream and
- Graduating from post-primary special classes or special schools

will provide a greater number of available places in existing special classes and special schools to meet the level of need of children and young people seeking a special class or special school place for the first time.

It is essential that schools continue to co-operate with the NCSE and provide information on available places through the normal annual movement of students. The NCSE requires all schools nationwide to submit the names and details of all expected leavers from their special classes or special schools early in the school year and on an ongoing basis. This information is key to forward planning at local school planning area.

#### **Notification of enrolments**

Schools continue to be required to inform the NCSE within 10 days of a special class or special school place being offered and accepted by a child or a young person. Where schools do not provide this information in the timelines, schools should be aware that this can negatively impact on allocation or review of resources by the Department and the NCSE. This information is key to forward planning and the timely allocation of staffing to schools.

#### **4. Eligibility criteria for enrolment in a special class or special school**

There are no changes to the eligibility criteria for accessing a special class or special school place as outlined in Circular 0039/2025.

A parent/guardian on behalf of a child or young person applying for special class or special school place for the 2027/2028 school year will continue to need a letter of eligibility from the NCSE confirming that the child or young person is known to them and that the child or young person has the required diagnosis and recommendation for a special class/special school.

**The requirement for a NCSE letter of eligibility is a prerequisite for enrolment in all types of special classes and special schools for the 2027/2028 school year and must be reflected in schools' admission policies. A letter of eligibility is applicable for admission for one school year only, and therefore, if a specialist place was not taken up as part of admissions for the 2026/2027 school year, a new letter of eligibility must be sought and obtained for the 2027/2028 school year.**

#### **5. Guidance in relation to admissions**



The Department and the NCSE wish to remind schools of the importance of continuing to review admission policies.

In 2025, on foot of an Inspectorate report on admission policies for special classes<sup>1</sup> the Minister for Education and Youth wrote to all patron bodies seeking an urgent review of the admission policies of their schools with special classes. This review should consider the extent to which any references to the following four criteria in an admission policy are contained which can act as a barrier to children or young people accessing a special class place and can be considered not in accordance with the Admissions to School Act, 2018 and NCSE guidelines:

- Category of special educational needs that is not in line with the NCSE guidelines for the operation of special classes,
- Ability to participate in a mainstream class,
- Prioritisation of children and young people who are already enrolled in the school who are not notified to and verified by the NCSE for admission to a special class and
- Preventing children and young people with a recommendation for placement in a special class **or** a special school from accessing a place.

The report also referenced the use of stipulations in respect of the requirement to provide a current psychological report, written within the last two calendar years, which is expressly prohibited.

The review should also remove barriers that prevent applicants who have the category of special educational needs from accessing a special class in line with the school's admission policy. These barriers could include

- References to prospective students' potential behaviour,
- Additional requests for reports and documentation over and above a diagnosis and professional reports confirming eligibility for the special class and
- Reference to admission to the special class being contingent on resources.

An information note was also provided for schools last year<sup>2</sup>. In June 2026 a review conducted by the Inspectorate found that half of the schools examined continued to have admission policies for special classes that included clauses

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<sup>1</sup> [Supporting all children and young people to access an appropriate education: A review of admission policies](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Information note for schools - admission to special classes and special schools](#)



that could prevent children and young people with significant level of needs accessing special class places<sup>3</sup>. The Department takes very seriously any inclusion of clauses in admission policies which has the effect of preventing children and young people accessing specialist placements. The Department is writing directly now to the boards of management of the fifteen schools to request that the relevant clauses are removed from the schools' admission policy. The Department will consider any necessary additional measures which may be required to ensure compliance with admissions to special classes and special schools and therefore early and full confirmation from those who have been reviewed will be essential in providing that reassurance on this important issue.

It is therefore vitally important that all school patron bodies continue to work with schools to review their admission policies in relation to special classes and special schools.

### **Admissions to specific class groupings in special schools**

Given the increasing level of need it is important that special schools work to ensure that all school places are filled and enrolment levels are maintained, if not expanded each year. Schools should reconfigure class groupings to ensure that all available places in the school are available and filled.

Some schools operating an annual admissions process, may notify applicants of available places in very specific class groups – e.g. moderate general learning disability class for students aged 10 to 13 or aged 14 to 18 etc

Where schools operate the initial stage of their admission processes in this way, it is imperative that schools do not have unfilled places. Thus, schools should ensure that they have a process in their admissions policies, for the procedures in place after running their initial admissions process, for moving to offer places to applicants on their waiting lists for other class groupings until full enrolment is achieved.

In addition, many special schools prioritise the admission of younger children starting school for the first time. The level of need for special school places tends to span a much boarder age range and special schools are requested to consider this carefully and reflect it in their admission policies.

### **Requirement for recent professional reports**

Schools should refrain from including clauses in their admissions policies which stipulate the requirement for a recent professional report in relation to a child or

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<sup>3</sup> [Inspectorate Annual Review of Admission Policies: Special Classes for Autistic Students 2026](#)



young person's special educational needs – e.g. stating. reports must be written within the last two years. This is not permitted and creates additional burdens for children and young people accessing places being provided across the school system.

## 6. Queries

Any queries in relation to this Circular Letter can be addressed to the Department of Education and Youth at the following email addresses:

[special\\_education@education.gov.ie](mailto:special_education@education.gov.ie)

Further guidance on the measures outlined in this Circular Letter will be provided via a Frequently Asked Questions document if necessary.

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