



CPSMA submission in relation to the Education (Admissions to Schools) Act 2018

Introduction

CPSMA would like to thank the National Council of Special Education for the opportunity to provide this submission with regard to the provision in the Education (Admissions to Schools) Act 2018, which entitles the Minister to compel a school to make additional provision for the education of children with special educational needs, which will be commenced on 3rd December 2018.

Overview

The provision of a special class provides opportunities and challenges for schools.

1. Special classes are a very positive development for our schools in a whole school sense. They provide opportunities for pupils to achieve, to prosper and to integrate with their peers in a whole school setting.
2. Special classes in our schools also provide opportunities for staff to learn new skills and take on other more specialised teaching roles in the school.
3. Special classes in our schools provide opportunities for our school communities to enrich themselves in knowledge, learning and support for pupils with special needs.

Concerns

In a survey of principals conducted by CPSMA in June 2018, some concerns were highlighted by the principals including-

- Management of difficult behaviour;
- Difficulty in accessing appropriate training for teachers and SNAs;
- Difficulty in accessing external supports and appropriate therapies;
- Increased workload for principals, particularly teaching principals;

Criteria

CPSMA believes that the following factors need to be considered when selecting a school for the provision of a special class.

- Size of the school, accommodation and available space;
- Demand for places in the catchment area;
- School profile (DEIS, Single sex school etc);
- Location of other special classes in the area;
- Ease of access of the school to therapy and other supports i.e. NEPS;
- Ease of access to transport for children with special needs;
- Existing knowledge of SENO in relation to the relevant schools;
- Material gathered through consultation process involving Patron, Board of Management and Principal;

Recommendations:

1. Schools should, whenever possible, be encouraged and supported to establish special classes notwithstanding the power to compel contained in the Act.
2. Adequate continuous professional development for teachers and SNAs working in mainstream schools with special classes, must be made available on a whole-school basis, to schools with special classes.
3. CPSMA believes that an independent professional opinion is needed in order to assess the school in terms of its accommodation and space and suitability for the provision of a special class (at no cost to the school).
4. CPSMA call for a national, Department of Education and Skills approved approach to dealing with challenging behaviour within special classes and whole-school training for such an approach.
5. CPSMA recommends that a guideline of 45 min to 1 hour should be set as the maximum travel time for a child attending a school with a special class attached.
6. Consideration should be given to ensure a fair geographical dispersion of special classes, thereby ensuring equality of access for pupils.
7. CPSMA recommends that NCSE explores a pilot “cluster” model of flexible movement of staff, among numbers of small schools in a geographical area, in order to give teachers in that area, the opportunity to teach in the special class in the selected school. This way, the school with the special class attached has access to other teachers in neighbouring schools.
8. CPSMA understands, that while the school in an area which has displayed a considerable commitment to special needs in the past, may be considered the best option when choosing the school for provision of a special class, it recommends that a school that has yet to open a special class be particularly considered, in order to afford such a school this opportunity.
9. CPSMA is cognisant of the extra workload and responsibility that the provision of a special class brings on the Board of Management, principal and teaching staff. For a teaching principal, the challenge is having to manage, what are in effect, two separate schools with very different needs, challenges and expectations under the one roof, creating one successful educational facility, while teaching full-time. To this end, CPSMA believe that serious consideration should be given to ensuring that every school with special classes should have an administrative principal.
10. Many smaller schools only have access to part- time secretaries and caretakers. The increased administrative burden on schools selected for provision of special classes could be alleviated by the provision of increased funding towards provision of ancillary staff.