

Circular 0030/2014

Circular to the Management Authorities of Primary Schools, Special Schools, Secondary, Community and Comprehensive Schools and the Chief Executive Officers of the Educational Training Boards

The Special Needs Assistant (SNA) scheme to support teachers in meeting the care needs of some children with special educational needs, arising from a disability

1. Summary of Circular

The main issues addressed in this Circular are:

- This Circular clarifies and restates the purpose of the SNA scheme, which is to provide schools with additional adult support staff who can assist children with special educational needs who also have additional and significant care needs. Such support is provided in order to facilitate their attendance at school and to minimise disruption to class or teaching time for the pupils concerned, or for their peers, and with a view to developing their independent living skills. **(Section 2: Introduction and Section 3: The SNA Scheme)**
- It provides details of the **primary care needs** for which SNA support will usually be provided and details the types of **secondary care associated tasks** which SNAs may often perform, but only once they have been allocated on the basis of a requirement to provide for primary care needs: **(Section 4: Care Needs)**
- The Circular clarifies the role of the Classroom Teacher and Resource/Learning Support Teachers to provide for the education of a child, and the role of an SNA to support those teachers in assisting with care needs **(Section 5: The Role of the Classroom Teacher, Resource Teacher and SNA)**
- The role that professional reports play in supporting the SNA scheme is set out. While professional reports play a valuable role in identifying the needs of a child, responsibility for deciding on the quantum of educational supports to be provided to schools rests with the NCSE, in accordance with DES policy: **(Section 6: The Role of Medical and other Professional Reports)**

- The Circular details the circumstances in which SNA support will be provided for behaviour related care needs. SNA support will only be provided for behaviour related care needs where there is a clear diagnosis of EBD/SEBD, or a behavioural disorder in conjunction with another disability, and also where it is clear that behavioural management strategies have not been successful to date, and where it is demonstrated how access to SNA support can assist the child: **(Section 7: SNA Support for Pupils with Behavioural Care Needs)**
- Details of the particular requirements for SNA support for children with sensory impairment are included: **(Section 8: SNA support for Children with Visual or Hearing Impairment).**
- The Circular provides details of the NCSE allocation process, which is designed to allocate a quantum of SNA support to schools annually to cater for the care needs of qualifying children. **(Section 9: NCSE Allocation process, Section 10: Allocation of Quantum of Support for Schools)**
- Pupils should access the support of an SNA based on their level of needs arising during the school day. The responsibility of schools in relation to the management and deployment of SNAs and requirements to ensure that pupils can develop independent living skills are detailed at **(Section 11: Access to SNA Support, Section 12: Role of School to Manage SNA Support)**
- All SNA allocations are subject to annual review by the NCSE. All allocations will be time bound, made initially for a period of three years, subject to annual review, and subject to a full re-assessment at the end of the three year period. **(Section 13: Annual Review and Section 14: Time bound Allocation)**
- Schools are required to put in place a Personal Pupil Plan (PPP) including a care plan for all pupils availing of SNA support. Schools who employ SNAs must have a clear policy in place, as part of the school planning process to manage and deploy SNAs: **(Section 15: Personal Pupil Plan (PPP))**
- The importance of paying cognisance to the viewpoint of the child in reviewing the level of access to SNA required is set out at **(Section 16: The View of the Child)**
- The policy in relation to SNA deployment at Post Primary school level is detailed: **(Section 17: Post Primary SNA Allocation)**
- Details of how parents or schools may appeal the level of SNA support allocated for a child **(Section 18: Appeal to School and Section 19: NCSE Appeals Process)**

2. Introduction

The Special Needs Assistant (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. Such support is provided in order to facilitate the attendance of those pupils at school and also to minimise disruption to class or teaching time for the pupils concerned, or for their peers, and with a view to developing their independent living skills.

The Special Needs Assistant scheme has been a key factor in ensuring the successful inclusion of children with special educational needs into mainstream education, and also with providing care support to pupils who are enrolled in special schools and special classes.

Since the criteria for the SNA scheme were last set out in DES Circular 07/02, there have been a number of developments in relation to the provision of special educational supports to schools. This includes; the establishment of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and the expansion of National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS); the establishment of the Special Education Support Services (SESS); new school transport and Bus Escort arrangements; and the provision of additional learning support and resource teachers for Primary and Post-Primary schools.

In 2011, the DES published a comprehensive Value for Money and Policy Review of the SNA scheme which made a number of recommendations with regard to the future operation of the SNA scheme. This Review found that the SNA Scheme is supporting schools in meeting the needs of students with disabilities, who also have significant care needs, and that the SNA scheme has assisted in enabling as many students as possible to be included in mainstream schools.

However, the Review also found that the purpose of the scheme and the allocation process is generally not well understood within schools or by parents. It found that the deployment of SNAs in schools had in practice moved away from the objectives originally envisaged, which was to provide for children's care needs, and had moved towards SNA involvement in behavioural, therapeutic, pedagogical/teaching and administrative duties.

It recommended that the criteria for allocation of support should be restated and clarified for both parents and schools.

The NCSE has also recently published a number of policy advice papers in relation to the provision of services for children with special educational needs, including; 'The Future Role of Special Schools and Classes', 'The Education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children'; 'The Education of Students With Challenging Behaviour Arising from Severe Emotional Disturbance/ Behaviour' and; 'Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs'; which make a number of recommendations in relation to the provision of SNA support.

This Circular replaces DES Circulars 07/02 and 09/2009. It should be read in conjunction with:

- DES Circular 0071/2011: Public Service (Croke park) Agreement – Special Needs Assistants http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0071_2011.pdf
- DES Circular 058/2006 Redundancy Arrangements for SNA and DES Circulars 12/05 and 15/05 on Contract of Employment for SNA www.education.ie

- Guidelines on the Individual Education Plan process
http://www.ncse.ie/uploads/1/final_report.pdf
- Special Educational Needs- A Continuum of Support
http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/Educational-Psychologist-NEPS-/neps_special_needs_resource_pack.pdf
- A Continuum of Support for Post Primary Schools
http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/Educational-Psychologist-NEPS-/neps_post_primary_continuum_resource_pack.pdf
- Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD) – A Continuum of Support
http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/Educational-Psychologist-NEPS-/neps_besd_continuum_teacher_guide.pdf
- Sp ED Circular 02/05: Organisation of Teaching resources for Pupils who need Additional Support in Mainstream Primary Schools
<http://www.education.ie/en/Advanced-Search/?q=Sp%20ed%2002/05>
- DES Circular 08/02: Applications for full or Part Time Resource Teachers
www.education.ie
- Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs: Post Primary Guidelines
http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/insp_inclusion_students_sp_ed_needs_pp_guidelines_pdf.pdf
- Guidelines for Developing School Codes of Behaviour
http://www.newb.ie/codes_of_behaviour_guidelines/introduction.asp

3. The SNA Scheme

SNA support is provided specifically to assist recognised primary, post primary and special schools to cater for the care needs of pupils with disabilities in an educational context, where the nature of these care needs have been outlined in professional reports as being so significant that a pupil will require adult assistance in order to be able to attend school and to participate in education.

SNA support is provided in recognised primary and post primary schools only. SNA support is not provided in centres which are not recognised schools, but which may be providing services for young people, such as medical facilities, youth detention centres, high support units, hospitals, crèche and pre school settings. Such facilities will generally have a care dimension incorporated into their own staffing arrangements.

SNA support is also not provided for adults attending education centres or to third level education colleges which also have their own arrangements to cater for students with special needs.

Applications from recognised schools under this scheme should be made to the NCSE, as set out in Section 9 of this Circular.

Applications for SNA support will be considered under this scheme where medical or other relevant professional reports set out that a pupil has significant care needs arising from:

- (i) a significant medical need, or
- (ii) a significant impairment of physical or sensory function.

Section 6 of the Circular provides details on the role that medical and other relevant professional reports and assessments play in assisting to identify the care needs of children and guiding the allocation process.

Section 7 of this Circular sets out the circumstances under which SNA support may be allocated to provide for the care needs of pupils whose disability categorisation is that of Emotional Behaviour Disorder or Severe Emotional Behavioural Disorder, or where the care needs specified relate to behavioural disturbance or behavioural related care needs.

4. Care Needs

All children require care and attention in school. This is particularly true in relation to younger children and infants. All schools have responsibility to provide for the care and wellbeing of all the pupils who attend their schools including children with special educational needs.

It should not be assumed that all children who have special educational needs or who have been diagnosed as having a disability, require access to SNA support.

It should also not be assumed that the allocation of additional adult SNA support is a prerequisite for a student with special educational needs to attend school.

The purpose of the SNA scheme is to provide for the significant additional care needs which some pupils with special educational needs may have.

It is therefore important to set out what constitutes significant care needs under the terms of this scheme, and which will normally qualify for SNA support under the scheme.

For a child to require or qualify for access to SNA support, a child must have an assessed disability. The care needs outlined must be of such significance that they are beyond that which would normally be expected to be provided to a child by the child's class teacher, support teacher, or other school teachers, or beyond the level of assistance which could be offered to the student by his/ or her fellow pupils in school. The care needs must also be those beyond which could normally be provided for by alternative supportive approaches or modifications of the classroom environment, teaching approaches and/or assistive technology or specialist equipment.

The type of significant care needs that pupils may have can be varied, depending on the nature or level of the disability or sensory impairment that a child may have. Given the variety of medical conditions that children may suffer from, it is not possible to list all of the care needs that may arise here.

However, examples of the primary care needs which would be considered significant – and which might require SNA support are:

- **Assistance with feeding:** where a child with special needs requires adult assistance and where the extent of assistance required would overly disrupt normal teaching time
- **Administration of medicine:** where a child requires adult assistance to administer medicine and where the extent of assistance required would overly disrupt normal teaching time

- **Assistance with toileting and general hygiene: (including catheterisation)** where a child with special needs cannot independently self-toilet, and until such time as they are able to do so
- **Assistance with mobility and orientation:** on an ongoing basis including assisting a child or children to access the school, the classroom, with accessing school transport (where provided, school Bus Escorts should, in the first instance, assist a child to access school transport), or helping a child to avoid hazards in or surrounding the school. (Every effort must be made by the school to provide opportunities for independence e.g. the removal of hazards.)
- **Assisting teachers to provide supervision in the class, playground and school grounds:** at recreation, assembly, and dispersal times including assistance with arriving and departing from school for pupils with special needs where the school has made a robust case that existing teaching resources cannot facilitate such supervision
- **Non-nursing care needs associated with specific medical conditions:** such as frequent epileptic seizures or for pupils who have fragile health.
- **Care needs requiring frequent interventions including withdrawal of a pupil from a classroom when essential:** This may be for safety or personal care reasons, or where a child may be required to leave the class for medical reasons or due to distress on a frequent basis.
- **Assistance with moving and lifting of children, operation of hoists and equipment.**
- **Assistance with severe communication difficulties** including enabling curriculum access for pupils with physical disabilities or sensory needs (See also section 9) and those with significant, and identified social and emotional difficulties. Under the direction of the teacher, this might include assistance with assistive technology equipment, typing or handwriting, supporting transition, assisting with supervision at recreation, dispersal times etc.

The tasks noted above are the primary care support tasks for which access to SNA support will normally be provided.

The following tasks are the type of **secondary care associated tasks** which SNAs will often perform, but only once they have been allocated on the basis of the **primary care support tasks** listed above. The indicative list of secondary associated tasks listed below is not definitive and is reflective of the tasks detailed in Circulars 08/02 and 71/2011.

The associated support tasks which may be carried out, but which would not in themselves normally constitute a reason for the allocation of SNA support include:

- Preparation and tidying of workspaces and classrooms or assisting a child who is not physically able to perform such tasks to prepare and tidy a workspace, to present materials, to display work, or to transition from one lesson activity to another. To assist with cleaning of materials.
- Assistance with the development of Personal Pupil Plans for children with special

educational needs, with a particular focus on developing a care plan to meet the care needs of the pupil concerned and the review of such plans.

- Assist teachers and/or Principal in maintaining a journal or care monitoring system for pupils including details of attendance and care needs. Assist in preparation of school files and materials relating to care and assistance required in class by students with special needs.
- Planning for activities and classes where there may be additional care requirements associated with particular activities, liaising with class teachers and other teachers such as the resource teacher and school principal, attending meetings with parents, SENO, NEPS Psychologists, or school staff meetings with the agreement and guidance of class teacher/principal
- Assistance with enabling a pupil to access therapy or psycho-educational programmes such as anger management or social skills classes, under the direction of qualified personnel¹, including class teachers or support teachers.
- Assistance to attend or participate in out of school activities: walks, or visits, where such assistance cannot be provided by teaching staff.

5. The Role of the Classroom Teacher and Resource/Learning Support Teachers and the Role of an SNA to support those teachers

Students with special educational needs can have very complex learning needs and should be taught by qualified and experienced teachers who are equipped with the necessary skills to meet the needs of these students.

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 and it would not be appropriate for pupils with special needs to be taught by unqualified personnel.

Section 22 (1) of the Education Act 1998 states the primacy of the teacher in the education and personal development of students in schools. The classroom teacher is responsible for educating all pupils in his/her class, including any pupil with a special educational need. The class teacher has primary responsibility for the progress and care of all pupils in his/her classroom, including pupils with special educational needs.

¹Therapy interventions such as speech and language and physiotherapy services are often provided to students who require such therapy in schools by HSE medical professionals.

The role of the SNA is to support the care needs of a child. Therefore, while it is appropriate for SNAs to assist students to access therapy support in schools, or to assist a therapist in providing support for a child or assist the child to perform therapy tasks directed by a therapist, it is not appropriate for an SNA to be expected to be responsible for the management or provision of therapy services in view of the particular skill-set required to deliver therapeutic interventions. Accordingly, the delivery of therapies is not in itself a reason to warrant the allocation of an SNA post nor can the provision of SNA support be made to compensate for a lack of therapy provision by qualified personnel.

It is the responsibility of the classroom teacher to ensure that each pupil is taught in a stimulating and supportive classroom environment where all pupils feel equal and valued. The teacher will have access to all information that is likely to be relevant to teaching or supervising a pupil with special educational needs. The classroom teacher also has a central role in identifying and responding to pupils with additional needs. These responses will be informed and assisted by collaboration with colleagues, parents/guardians and others such as the school's NEPS psychologist and the local SENO.

The classroom teacher will also make specific accommodations for a pupil within the class as a result of concerns about a pupil's progress, application, communication, behaviour or interaction with peers.

When a pupil with significant and complex care needs has access to support from a SNA the classroom teacher will work closely with the SNA. However the class teacher continues to have primary responsibility for teaching and learning and for the social and emotional development and progress of the pupil.

Though the SNA can provide useful assistance to the teacher in ensuring that the pupil is able to access education, the role of the SNA is not to provide additional tuition, as this is the role of qualified learning support/resource teachers who may assist the teacher to provide additional teaching to pupils with special educational needs.

Additional Teaching Support

Many children with significant special educational needs require additional teaching support in schools². In such circumstances, the classroom teacher will be supported by a resource teacher/learning support teacher, who are fully qualified teachers who will have access to additional training in the area of special education, and who will work closely with the class teacher to provide additional teaching support for children with special educational needs (SEN).

The classroom teacher and resource /learning support teacher will consider ways in which the curriculum can be differentiated or adapted to suit the needs of individual pupils so as to make the best use of the additional teaching hours. This may also involve identifying the most appropriate teaching strategies and programmes to meet the child's needs. Parents are typically consulted as part of this process.

Resource/learning support can be provided in a variety of ways. The support teacher might team-teach by working in the classroom with the class teacher or withdraw students in small groups and/or individually for a period of time (depending upon the nature of pupils needs) for intensive teaching of key skills.

Whereas the SNA may assist to ensure the delivery of both class teaching and additional teaching, the SNA is not the person who is designated to deliver this teaching or instruction.

² Access to resource teaching/learning support is provided to schools either under the General Allocation Model or through additional resource teaching hours allocated to schools in respect of individual pupils in line with criteria set down by the Department of Education and Skills. The criteria specify the level or number of additional hours to be provided to pupils according to the category or type of need for which they have been assessed. The allocation is made to schools by NCSE SENOs.

6. Role of Medical and other Professional Reports/Recommendations by Medical and other Professionals

SNAs are provided specifically to assist schools to cater for pupils with disabilities, who have additional and significant care needs, in an educational context and where the nature of these care needs have been outlined in medical and other professional reports as being so significant that a pupil will require additional adult assistance in order to be able to attend school and to participate in education.

Professional reports and assessments therefore play an important role in the SNA allocation process.

Responsibility for deciding on the quantum of educational supports and resources to be allocated to schools to support individual pupils, rests with the NCSE, in accordance with DES policy.

The consideration of professional reports is an integral part of determining the extent of supports to be provided for pupils with special educational needs. However, whereas health reports provide valuable assistance to education providers in identifying a diagnosis or identifying appropriate interventions, health staff have been directed by the HSE not to include references to the specific quantum of educational resources in their reports, but should state the outcome of assessments carried out and the range of needs of the child as clearly as possible.

This is because, while a medical or relevant professional report can indicate the care needs that a child may have, the Health professional will not have knowledge or awareness of the current resources available to a school to cater for these care needs, will not be aware of the layout of the school, or have had an opportunity to observe the child in class or observe their interaction with their teachers and classmates on an ongoing basis.

It is the role of the NCSE to process applications from schools for SNA support, taking into account the frequency and extent of the care needs as referenced in the professional report, the manner in which they arise in a school setting and in this regard, the evidence the school can provide to support the application. The NCSE can also consult with other professional e.g. NEPS and will allocate a level of SNA support to a school to ensure that the school has sufficient resources to cater for the significant care needs of the relevant children who are enrolled in the school for whom it has been indicated that there is a care requirement.

In general, it is therefore expected that all primary school pupils having their first school experience will have been enrolled and have commenced attending school before any application for support will be made.

7. SNA Support for Pupils with Behaviour Related Care Needs

The Value for Money and Policy Review of the SNA scheme found, that in many instances, SNAs were being used, contrary to the intended purpose of the scheme, to contain or manage pupil behaviour as distinct from students receiving appropriate interventions in school through individualised planning, whole-school pupil management strategies (including the promotion of positive relationships between and among staff and students), and additional psycho-educational

programmes (such as anger management or social skills classes) and psychiatric/medical interventions, as required.

Students with challenging behaviour need, in the first instance, should be supported by their class teachers, other school staff members, and by whole school policies on the management of behaviour in schools. The responsibility for the overall progress of students with behavioural difficulties lies with the classroom teacher. The emphasis in the school situation should be on the development of well co-ordinated interventions in response to the child's identified needs. The provision of appropriate teaching and health supports, as required, should result in improved behaviours, leading to improved educational outcomes for children with Emotional Behavioural Disorder (EBD) or Severe Emotional Behavioural Disorder (SEBD).

For children who are experiencing behavioural difficulties or who have received a diagnosis which places them in the EBD disability category, it should not be assumed that all children who have some form of emotional behaviour disturbance require access to SNA support or that SNA support is the appropriate intervention in each instance.

A range of guidelines are available to support schools in meeting the needs of children with behaviour, emotional and social difficulties. These include:

- Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD) – A Continuum of Support Guidelines www.education.gov.ie
- DES Information Guides for Primary and Post Primary schools on Supporting Students with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties www.education.gov.ie/
- Guidelines for Developing School Codes of Behaviour www.newb.ie

The Information Guides above indicate that behavioural, emotional and social difficulties can occur on a continuum from mild, transient difficulties to difficulties which are significant and persistent. Thus, responses provided should be incremental, moving from classroom based interventions to more intensive and individualised interventions. The timing and pace of implementation may vary depending on the level of need and the nature of the presenting problems, with interventions tailored to the individual needs of pupils.

Provision of SNA support should therefore not be considered as a first response for management of behaviour. SNA support should only be provided where it is clear that behavioural management strategies have not been successful to date and where it is demonstrated how access to such support can assist with ongoing planning and intervention for the child

Thus, SNA support is not a substitute for the normal behavioural management and disciplinary practices that a school is required to have in place.

Where a professional report has identified care needs as being related to behaviour, access to SNA support will only be considered after the school has set out the specific strategies that have been employed to manage the behaviour and those that have been implemented to minimise the pupil's difficulties in accordance with the staged approach recommended by the guidelines which recommend a number actions or interventions at different stages;³

³ At second level the three stages of assessment and intervention are referred to as: 1. Support for All (Whole school Approaches/classroom/Subject Support); 2. School Support (for Some) Individual and/or Group approaches; 3. School Support Plus (for a Few) Individual.

(1) Classroom Support when a teacher first becomes aware that a pupil is showing significant behavioural, emotional and social difficulties;

(2) School Support which involves more systematic gathering of information relating to the pupil's behaviour and the development and monitoring of a support plan (in collaboration with the learning support/resource teacher, principal) and finally;

(3) School Support Plus which involves a more intensive individualised response for those pupils with more severe and/or persistent needs and will often include liaison with outside agencies and professionals.

Further guidance on the type of classroom and school supports which can be provided are available in the DES Information Guides for Primary and Post Primary schools on Supporting Students with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties which are available at www.education.gov.ie/

Schools may also seek advice from their local NEPS psychologist as to how children with behavioural needs can best be supported in schools. NEPS supports schools in developing whole school responses, including specific interventions for groups of children and for individual pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. SENOs provide advice in relation to SNA deployment and support for pupils' care needs. Further assistance may also be provided to schools by the Special Educational Support Service (SESS), by the National Behavioural Support Service (NBSS) for post primary schools who can be contacted through the Navan Education Support Centre for advice on positive behaviour and learning throughout the school.

Where there is a diagnosis of EBD/SEBD, or a diagnosis of a behavioural disorder in conjunction with another disability categorisation, access to SNA support will only be sanctioned in cases:

- **where it is clear that school based interventions have been attempted and have not worked to date (as evidenced in educational and behavioural plans and reviews)**
- **where there is a clear and documented history of violent behaviour, assault, or self harm, or other safety issues including leaving the school premises.**
- **where it has been clearly demonstrated that the behaviour of the child is such that it is impossible to teach him/her in a classroom situation without additional adult assistant support on a temporary basis.**
- **Where the school sets out clearly how access to SNA support will support educational and behavioural planning.**

As SNA support will only be sanctioned for behavioural related care needs in the circumstances detailed above, in the case of new applications for SNA support, where a professional report has identified the care needs as being related to behaviour, in general, it will not be possible to consider access to SNA support until there has been a clear assessment of the child's needs in the classroom setting and other school contexts.

Schools will also be required to detail what interventions have been put in place, including the specific strategies that have been employed to minimise the pupil's difficulties and to promote more adaptive behaviours.

Where an application relates to the management of a student's behaviour, there must be clear evidence that sustained efforts have been put in place by the school and that these have not proven to be successful to date in the amelioration of such documented behaviours.

Where access to SNA support is granted overall progress continues to lie with the classroom teacher (supported by learning support or resource teacher) and that the child should not be excluded for extended periods of time from the classroom setting.

The care role of the SNA, in instances where SNA support is sanctioned to assist with behavioural related care needs, is concerned with assisting the teacher to meet the care needs of the child by:

- preserving the safety of the pupil and others with whom the pupil is in contact
- assisting to ensure the prevention of self injurious or destructive behaviour
- reinforcing good behaviour on the child's part and acting as a positive role model for the child
- Assisting with recording data in relation to pupil behaviour and behavioural development

As set out in section 15 below, the deployment of all additional supports which are provided to support children with special needs should be linked to personalised planning processes for the pupils for whom the applications are being made.

It is important to ensure that the school has a clear plan in place as to how an SNA resource, which is being provided to assist with behavioural difficulties, will be utilised and to set out the timeframe for which this resource is expected to be required. The plan should also demonstrate how the school intends to actively reduce, and, if possible, eliminate dependency on SNA support within a reasonable timeframe and should include time-bound targets for the development of independence skills and for a reduction in behavioural difficulties.

SNA support should not be considered as a permanent solution to behavioural problems but as an assistive support to try to improve and adjust behaviours in a managed way over a period of time.

All SNA allocations for behavioural purposes will therefore be time bound, being made initially for a maximum period of three years, subject to annual review, and a full reassessment of the child's care needs before the end of the three year period.

8. SNA Support for Children with Visual and Hearing Impairment

Children with acute sensory impairment such as visual or hearing impairment have particular and distinct care needs which are of a non teaching nature, but where the assistance of SNA support is required for those pupils to be able to attend school and to be able to access the curriculum.

SNAs can assist in providing access to peer interaction and curriculum participation for pupils who have a hearing impairment and who communicate through sign language. They may also assist in the care and preparation of audiological and assistive technology equipment.

For pupils with visual impairment they may assist in the preparation of Braille materials, tactical graphics, assistive technology equipment, large print assists, and also assist with orientation and mobility throughout the school day.

Care support may also assist to ensure that such students do not experience social isolation and exclusion due to an inability to communicate with staff members and peers.

Circular 0071/2011, which outlined the revised employment terms and conditions for SNAs, restated the role of the SNA in Ireland to ensure that it includes the necessary duties that are required to support the care needs of Deaf and hard of hearing students.

In addition to the care needs detailed in Section 4 of this Circular there are additional support needs which children with hearing impairment require including the use of Sign Language support in order to assist with communication and socialisation.

- **Schools should therefore ensure that SNAs who work with Deaf and hard of hearing children are equipped with the skills necessary to support the particular needs of these pupils, including capacity to use Sign Language where required.**
- **Where existing SNA staff are required to be trained to provide Sign Language or specialist training (Braille, Lámh, Sign Language, Augmentive/Alternative Interventions) to assist in the provision of support for children with a specific sensory impairment, schools should ensure that the most senior SNA staff in the school are the staff that are trained in order to avoid a situation where staff trained in specialist skills may leave the school due to a reduction in the overall level of SNA support allocated to a school in future years.**

9. NCSE Allocation Process

The NCSE is responsible, through its network of local SENOs for allocating SNAs to schools to support children with special educational needs, in accordance with DES criteria, including a requirement to have regard to the overall limit on staffing numbers under the Employment Control Framework.

A key feature of the NCSE allocation process is to provide for an annual allocation of SNA support to eligible schools. The NCSE issues a Circular to schools each year requesting that they submit applications for SNA support to the NCSE in respect of applications for such support for the coming school year.

Having considered all of the applications received, the NCSE will advise schools of their SNA allocation quantum for the coming school year, taking into account the number of valid applications for SNA support and the assessed care needs of the children concerned. This gives schools certainty as to the resources which will be available to them for the coming school year and allows for school planning to commence as soon as possible.

Whereas the NCSE will continue to consider applications throughout the school year in cases where schools have enrolled new pupils with care needs, where new assessments have been forthcoming, or in cases of emergencies, the main allocation of SNA support is now made to schools on an annual allocation basis.

Full details regarding the NCSE allocation process are available at www.ncse.ie or through your SENO.

To ensure the greatest level of transparency and fairness possible the NCSE publish details of all SNA allocations which are made to school each year on their website. These details are also available at www.ncse.ie.

10. Allocation of Quantum of Support to Schools

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.

The NCSE allocates a quantum of SNA support for each school annually, taking into account the care needs of all of the qualifying children enrolled in the school, and on the basis of the assessed care needs of all of the children concerned, rather than solely by reference to a pupils disability categorisation.

The provision of a quantum of support to schools gives schools the autonomy and flexibility to manage their allocation of SNA support in order to utilise this support to the best possible effect. It allows schools to target support to those pupils who have the greatest degree of need at any given time, recognising that the level of need that a child may have may be variable over time. The school is in a position to use their educational experience and expertise to manage the level of support which has been allocated to them to provide for the care needs of identified children as and when those needs arise and to provide access to SNA support for all children who have been granted assess to support.

11. Access to SNA support

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.

Their role is not to act as a constant personal assistant to individual children, who need to be able to develop independent living skills and to associate independently with their classmates. Neither is the role of an SNA to act as an alternative teacher for children with special educational needs, who are required to be taught by the class teacher with additional support from resource/learning support teachers in schools.

Pupils will access the support of an SNA based upon their level of need, which can range from a requirement for brief periods during the day to most of the school day in some instances.

There are a relatively small number of children, who for medical or sensory reasons associated with their condition, require full time care support throughout the school day. For such children, access to full day support will be provided for and this will be reflected in the school quantum of SNA allocation.

The majority of children who have care needs, however, require attention and assistance at certain times of the school day and require intermittent intervention at particular points.

It is neither efficient nor beneficial for children to have a full time SNA assigned to them throughout the school day in circumstances where they do not require this level of support. A valuable resource may be wasted for much of the school day and pupils who need to develop independent living skills and intermingle independently with their class mates may be prevented from doing so.

Students who have care needs requirements are therefore granted access to SNA support, whereby a quantum of SNA support is allocated to a school, which is reflective of the assessed individual needs of a group of identified children. Those SNAs will then be in a position to cater for the care needs of those designated pupils, as the need arises, and as they require assistance, with the level of support being provided reflecting actual need at any given time.

It is important to ensure that the presence of SNA support does not create over dependency, act as a barrier or intermediary between the student and class teacher or contribute to the social isolation of students by creating a barrier between the students and his/her peers.

A key aspiration for pupils with special educational needs is that they will, on completion of their school-based education, be able to graduate as young independent adults in so far as this is possible. There is therefore a need to balance the support provided in schools with each pupil's right to acquire personal independence skills. As such, in order to give those pupils every opportunity possible to develop independent living skills, the assistive SNA support which is given to them should always be at the minimum level required to meet the care needs of the pupil.

The alternative would be the provision of too much SNA support, where a child can be overly shadowed or constantly monitored by an attached adult. As evidenced in the policy review, this can lead to social isolation, frustration, feelings of exclusion and can act as a barrier to a child achieving independent living skills.

Good practice is that SNA's will be aware of the various configurations of support such as close proximity and distance, as appropriate, with dependency upon a particular SNA being avoided.

Attending to students moving from dependence to independence can be bridged by the strategic use of team-teaching to assist the student in accessing learning in a less dependent classroom environment. The role of fellow students in this regard should also be considered.

12. Role of Schools to Manage SNA Support

SNAs should be deployed by schools in a manner which best meets the care support requirements of the children enrolled in the school for whom SNA support has been allocated. It is a matter for schools to allocate the support as required, and on the basis of individual need, which allows schools flexibility in how the SNA support is utilised.

Once allocated to schools, SNAs are important and valued members of the school community. An SNA is an important whole school resource. SNAs participate fully in the life of the school and may therefore also assist other children in the school, who from time to time need

assistance, or who have intermittent care needs, but who may not have been assessed as requiring SNA support on a permanent basis.

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 VEC in accordance with Circular 0071/2011.

The work of SNAs should, at the principal or teachers direction, be focussed on supporting the particular care needs of the student with special educational needs and should be monitored on an ongoing basis and modified accordingly.

The role and duties of SNAs and the intended purpose of the scheme, as set out in this Circular, should be communicated to parents by school authorities, when discussing the issue of provision of SNA support to qualifying children in the school with parents.

13. Annual Review

All SNA allocations are subject to annual review by the NCSE as each school now receives an annual allocation of support each year.

A key goal of SNA support is to help children to develop their independent living skills. It is important that pupils do not become over dependent on adult SNA support nor unduly isolated from peers. Where care needs diminish and the goal of independence is achieved, the level of SNA support required by the child should be reduced. In some cases, a pupil's care needs may remain constant, or increase, due to the nature of their condition. All pupils with access to SNA support therefore have their need for this support reviewed on a regular basis, with school and parental feedback being an important and valued part of the review process. The general rule being that the role of support staff should decrease as independence increases. A review of SNA support should include a review of the care support plan for the child concerned.

14. Timebound Allocation

The care needs of pupils are not constant but change as children grow and develop. In many instances, access to SNA care support may have been allocated to a pupil to ameliorate a particular difficulty that a pupil may have at a certain point in time, such as care support to assist with toileting issues, or a particular behaviour.

The care needs that a pupil has may change over time. Many children will naturally have diminishing care needs as they get older and as they develop both physically and socially.

It is neither appropriate nor beneficial for a child to have a permanent allocation of SNA support which would follow them throughout their school career without recourse to a consideration of changing needs. This could impede that child's development of independent living skills, interaction with peers, or stigmatise the child through association with a permanent allocation of adult support, at a point of their development where this support may no longer be required.

Whereas the NCSE will maintain the minimum SERC recommended ratios of SNA support in special schools and classes, all other SNA allocations which are made, from September 2014, will be time bound, linked to the provision of a personal pupil plan, will be made

initially for a maximum period of three years, subject to annual review, and subject to a full reassessment of their care needs at the end of the three year period.

15. Personal Pupil Plan (PPP)

Personalised Pupil Planning should be a feature of provision for all students with special educational needs. A team approach to the development, implementation and review of Personal Pupil Plans should be adopted. Where relevant, and in any instance where SNA support is provided, a care dimension should be included in the planning.

Schools are currently encouraged to use individualised planning through policy guidance, support, and training and the majority of schools now use some form of personal education planning for children with special needs.

Further assistance to schools in relation to the development of Personal Pupil Plans will be set out in forthcoming Circulars.

In the interim, the following documents from the National Educational Psychological Services, the National Council for Special Education, and the Special Education Support Services, contain information for schools, guidance, and sample Personal Pupil Plan templates which schools may wish to refer to, or use:

http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/Educational-Psychologist-NEPS-/neps_special_needs_resource_pack.pdf

http://www.ncse.ie/uploads/1/final_report.pdf

<http://www.sess.ie/resources/teaching-methods-and-organisation>

The deployment of all additional individualised supports, both teaching and non teaching, which are provided to support children with special needs should be linked to a personalised planning process for the pupils for whom the application is being made.

If an application is being made for additional support, such as care support, it is important to ensure that the school has a clear plan in place as to how this resource will be utilised and the timeframe for which this resource is expected to be required.

From the 2015/16 school year onwards, all new applications for SNA support must include a copy of that pupils PPP, must be clearly linked to the individualised planning in place for each student and specifically refer to the student's identified care needs. The plan must also focus on the proactive development of students' independence skills and set out the programmes and strategies that are being used to meet the child's needs.

Schools applying for SNA support from the 2015/16 school year will be required to submit a Personal Pupil Plan for each pupil outlining the pupil's special care needs and showing how the SNA will be deployed to assist the pupil. The plan should demonstrate how the school intends to actively reduce, and where appropriate, eliminate dependency on SNA support within a reasonable timeframe. The plan should include time-bound targets for the development of independence skills. Only a very small number of pupils with severe special

educational needs and very significant care needs will continue to require access to Special Needs Assistant support throughout their education.

Good practice is that the SNA should contribute to the care plan and support the student to voice their views on the Personal Pupil Plan. The SNA will also assist in monitoring the implementation and impact of the plan including documenting, via observation schedules, the progress being made in relation to the child's care needs on a day-to-day basis.

16. The Views of the Child.

In deciding the level and extent of access to SNA support which should be provided to a child, the best interests of the child should be the paramount consideration.

As far as practicable, the views of a child capable of forming his/her own views should be obtained and given due weight, having regard to the age and maturity of the child.

The views of the child, where possible, should therefore be taken into account in reviewing the extent of access to SNA support required.

17. Post Primary SNA Allocation

Transition to post-primary should be recognised as a critical time for a student with special educational needs.

Personal Pupil Plans for fourth and fifth class students should reflect this and focus on ensuring that student care needs are, in so far as possible, ameliorated before moving to post-primary.

Some pupils, particularly those with physical disabilities or conditions with enduring needs, will continue to have a requirement for some level of access to SNA support. In some instances, there may also be short term care needs for pupils with SEN as they transition to post primary schools.

For some pupils at post primary age, emerging conditions or needs may only manifest as the child or young adult gets older.

However, for the most part, only students with chronic and serious care needs arising from a disability should require SNA support either in sixth class or in primary and in post-primary schools. Care supports freed up as a result should be reinvested in further supplementary teaching supports for this group of students.

SNA support will be provided for Post Primary schools who enrol pupils with special educational care needs and support will be provided in a manner which recognises the distinct requirements of post primary schools, where pupils may attend a range of different classes as opposed to being based primarily in a single classroom.

However, continued and ongoing access to SNA support is generally not desirable for post-primary students, unless absolutely essential, as it can impede their independence and socialisation needs at an important developmental stage of their life.

The most appropriate form of support for post primary aged pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools will be a combination of differentiated and additional teaching supports from class teachers, from resource/learning support teachers either through team teaching or withdrawal, and from other relevant teaching staff, as opposed to care support from an SNA.

Accordingly, whereas SNA support will be provided to post primary schools when required, in general, only pupils with chronic and serious care needs will normally be allocated SNA support in post primary schools. In considering applications for SNA support from post primary schools the NCSE will take into account the importance of the requirement to allocate necessary care supports with the right of a child to acquire personal independence skills.

18. Appeal to School

In circumstances where a child has qualified for access to SNA support and is so being provided for within the quantum of SNA support which is allocated to a school, and where a parent feels that their child is not receiving sufficient care support in school, the parent should raise this concern in the first instance with the School Principal or the School Board of Management.

School management authorities have responsibility for the management and deployment of SNAs in their school and, therefore, have the potential to adjust or moderate the level of support which is being given to a child in the school.

19. NCSE Appeal process

The NCSE has developed an appeals process in relation to allocations of SNA support.

The appeal process allows schools, or parents, to appeal decisions made by SENOs to allocate Resource Teaching Hours (RTH) or SNAs to schools.

The kind of decisions which may be the subject of appeals are those either in relation to a child not qualifying for an SNA allocation, in accordance with DES criteria, or in relation to the quantum of resources allocated to a school, i.e. the number of SNAs allocated to a school to provide for the care needs of qualifying children.

Significant features of the new appeals process which has been developed by the NCSE are:

- Where a parent/school appeals the decision that a child was not granted access to resource teaching hours and/or SNA support on the grounds that the DES policy was not met
- Where the school considers that the SENO, in applying DES policy, has not allocated the appropriate level of teaching/SNA supports to the school to meet the special educational and/or care needs of the children concerned

Whereas appeals will be considered by Senior SENOs in the first instance there is potential for independent oversight in that schools/parents will have access to an independent Appeals Advisory Committee (AAC), should they consider that the operation of the appeals process was flawed or deficient.

Full details of the appeal process are available at www.ncse.ie

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