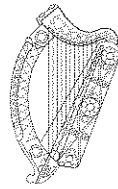


Oifig An Aire Oideachais agus Eolaíochta.  
Sráid Maoilbhríde,  
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Ms Mary Maguire  
Corporate Services Department  
South Dublin County Council  
Tallaght  
Dublin 24.

**PLEASE QUOTE REF NUMBER ON ALL CORRESPONDENCE**

Our Ref: 1001082 SF

23 February 2010

Dear Ms Maguire,

Thank you for your recent letter on behalf South Dublin County Council in relation to St. Joseph's Special School, Balrothery, Tallaght.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is an independent agency with responsibility for determining the appropriate staffing levels in relation to the support of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream and special schools. The NCSE, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is at present carrying out a review of SNA allocations in all schools with a view to ensuring that the criteria governing the allocation of such posts are properly met. This is an exercise in identifying surplus posts which are in the system and which do not meet the current criteria – posts that have been retained when a pupil's care needs have diminished or where the pupil has left.

The NCSE has advised the school in question that it is to reduce the number of SNAs by four and that this should be achieved by 19th February. The NCSE has also advised the school that it will not alter the level of teaching staff in the school for the remainder of the current school year.

The NCSE is committed to engaging with the school authorities and all other relevant State agencies to manage the situation in the short term and to ensure a sound basis for staff levels in the interest of pupils. My Department has already indicated to the NCSE that it is prepared to attend a meeting with the school if this is considered helpful. The NCSE is also arranging to meet with parents individually in consultation with the school authorities.

I have prioritised the provision of special education supports to schools. This is a key Government policy. However, this does not mean that resources, allocated in response to various historical factors, are retained in schools ad infinitum. At a time of constrained resources it is essential that we ensure that public resources, both staff and resources, are deployed as effectively as possible. Resources left in an area that are not in accordance with criteria mean public resources are not available for another deserving area.

I am sure that you share my concerns to ensure that there is a consistent application of policy in relation to the allocation of special needs supports across the country. This is all that is happening at the moment. I can assure you that supports will continue to be made available to schools which have enrolled pupils who qualify for such support and children with special educational needs will continue to have access to an appropriate education in line with my Department's policy.

I hope this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Batt O'Keeffe', written over a horizontal line.

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Batt O'Keeffe T.D.  
Minister for Education and Science