

1st July 2011

Deputy Ruairí Quinn
Minister for Education and Skills
Office of the Minister for Education and Skills
Marlborough Street
Dublin 1

Our Ref: 28249

Re: Lucan Area Committee Meeting of South Dublin County Council
held on 28th June 2011

Dear Minister,

At the meeting of the Lucan Area Committee held on the 28th June 2011 the following motion was passed by the Members of the Area Committee:

“That this Committee rejects the recent decisions to reduce the number of Special Needs Assistants in Primary and Second Level Schools, is seriously concerned about the consequences for Special Needs students in Lucan schools, in relation to, e.g., access to practical subjects, and asks the Manager to write to the Minister for Education and Skills requesting that the Special Needs Assistant Programme be reviewed and savings be sought from the budgets of other Departments.”

I would be obliged for your comments and response as soon as possible to enable me to revert to the Committee.

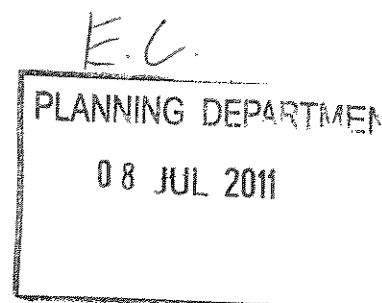
Yours sincerely,

Edel Colgan
Senior Staff Officer



Oifig an Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna
Office of the Minister for Education and Skills

Ms. Edel Colgan
Senior Staff Officer
South Dublin County Council
County Hall
Tallaght
Dublin 24



PLEASE QUOTE REF NUMBER ON ALL CORRESPONDENCE

Our Ref: 1104606

6th July 2011

Dear Ms. Colgan

Thank you for your recent letter to the Minister for Education and Skills, Mr. Ruairi Quinn TD in relation to special education.

As you will be aware, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOS) for allocating SNAs to schools to support children with special educational needs. The NCSE operates within the Department of Education and Skills criteria in allocating such support, which now includes a requirement for the NCSE to have regard to an overall cap on the number of SNA posts.

The total number of posts being provided for SNAs is 10,575 posts, which is a significant number of posts and represents an increase on the number of posts allocated in recent years.

It is considered that with equitable and careful management and distribution of these resources that there will be sufficient posts to provide access to SNA support for all children who require such care support to attend school, in accordance with Departmental criteria.

All schools, which enrol children with Special Educational Needs with significant care needs as identified in professional reports, will have SNA support allocated to the school and all such children will have access to SNA support.

However, in the context of the overall limit on the number of SNA posts available, it is necessary for the NCSE to prioritise applications and to distribute SNA resources equitably and efficiently across all schools.

While not prescriptive, the following are some of the priority criteria which the NCSE take into account when allocating SNA posts:

- ensuring that the minimum SNA to special class ratio is maintained in special schools and special classes
- ensuring support for children with incontinence issues
- ensuring those schools which require full day cover for children receive full day cover
- deferring the allocation of additional SNA supports to schools for Junior Infant pupils for whom behaviour is cited as the rationale for SNA support, other than in cases of well documented extremely challenging or dangerous behaviour
- prioritise schools which have enrolled pupils with newly diagnosed care needs and which do not have any SNA support
- encouraging the effective use of SNA posts, for example where two or more posts have been deployed in a single classroom

In considering the allocation of SNA posts account is also being taken of the recently published Policy Analysis and Value for Money Review of the SNA scheme.

In order to distribute SNA posts fairly across the school system, it is important for the NCSE to ensure that there is a consistent approach to the allocation of SNA supports for schools and that no schools have an over allocation of SNA posts, which might prevent them from allocating SNAs to children with care needs in other schools. As such, some schools may receive a reduction in SNA support in comparison to that allocated in previous years.

Some schools may have received a reduction in SNA support due to pupils with care needs having left a school, or where children have diminishing care needs.

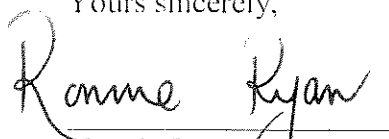
It should be noted that SNAs are a school based resource. The allocation of SNAs, while allocated on the basis of an assessed need of an individual child, are allocated to the school and should be deployed with discretion by the school in a manner which best meets the support requirements of children.

Where schools have had a reduction in their level of SNA allocation or have not received the level of SNA support that they feel is sufficient to cater for the care needs of pupils, the NCSE may review the level of care support during the school year.

The NCSE may revisit the level of SNA allocations for schools which are experiencing very significant and documented difficulties. They will also review allocations to ensure consistency and to review and consider appeals.

I hope this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,


Ronnie Ryan
Private Secretary