



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

Mr. Colm Murphy,
Meeting Administrator,
Corporate Performance and Change Management,
South Dublin County Council,
County Hall, Tallaght,
Dublin 24



PLEASE QUOTE REFERENCE NUMBER ON ALL CORRESPONDENCE:

Our Ref. 1605736/NO Your ref. M03/1016

13th December 2016

Dear Mr. Murphy,

I refer to your correspondence in respect of Special Needs Assistants Service and funding for such services.

I wish to advise that funding for special education provision in 2016 will amount to some €1.5 billion, which is equivalent to over 17% of the gross overall current allocation for education and training and an increase of 10% in spending in the past two years. This funding provides for a range of supports and services including additional learning and resource teaching support, access to Special Needs Assistant support, special transport arrangements, building adaptations, enhanced capitation in special schools and special classes, specialised equipment, additional teacher training and the services of the National Educational Psychological Service. The combination of supports provided means that school places are available for all children with special educational needs regardless of their level of need.

The Department's policy is that children with special educational needs should be included in mainstream placements with additional supports provided, unless such a placement would not be in their best interests or in the interests of the children with whom they are to be educated, as is provided for under Section 2 of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 (EPSEN Act 2004). Some children may be supported in a special class attached to a mainstream school. These students have the option, where appropriate, of full/partial integration and interaction with other pupils. Other children may have such complex needs that they are best placed in a special school. The Department, therefore, provides for a range of placement options and supports for schools, which have enrolled pupils with special educational needs, in order to ensure that wherever a child is enrolled, s/he will have access to an appropriate education.

Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are allocated to mainstream Primary, Post Primary, and Special Schools to 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 National Council for Special Education (NCSE) through its network of local Special

Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) is responsible for processing applications from schools for special needs assistants (SNA) supports. The NCSE operates within the Department of Education and Skills criteria in making recommendations for support as set out in the Department's Circular 0030/2014, which is available on the Department's website at www.education.ie.

In making SNA allocations to schools, the NCSE takes into account the assessed individual needs of all children with identified needs in the school. It should be noted, however, that SNA allocations are not made to individual children, but are made to schools to support the care needs of children with assessed special educational needs in the school. Once an allocation has been made to a school it is a matter for the school to make provision for the care needs of qualifying pupils and to allocate SNA support to provide for their care needs, as those needs arise.

Recent years have seen very significant increases in the number of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) which are being provided to schools to support children with special educational care needs. The number of SNA posts available for allocation to schools has increased from 10,575 posts in 2011, to 12,900 to date. In the same period the number of children accessing SNA support has grown from approximately 22,000 to some 30,000 by the end of 2015. The increase in SNA numbers has also been supported by a very significant increase in the Budget for SNAs, rising from €332 million in 2011 to €425 million by the end of 2016. As announced by the Minister in the recent Budget, an additional 115 SNA posts, at an annual cost of €3.75m, will be provided for allocation from January to June 2017 in order to meet the level of identified demand. This additional allocation will bring the total number of SNAs which may be allocated to schools in 2017 to 13,015 posts. In total, this represents an increase of 23% over the numbers allocated in 2011. This increase, which will provide for a higher level of SNA support than ever before, reflects the growing participation of children with Special Needs and will support their full participation and progression within the educational system.

I trust this addresses the issue raised in your correspondence.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Derek Newcombe', written in a cursive style.

Derek Newcombe
Private Secretary