An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Circular 0064/2024

Circular to the Management Authorities of Primary and Post Primary Schools and the Chief Executives of Education and Training Boards.

The operation/application and deployment of Special Education Teacher resources.

1. Purpose of this circular

This circular replaces circular 13/2017 and 14/2017.

The purpose of this circular, supported by the Guidelines and Indicators of Effective Practice, is to enable all schools to support children and young people with special education needs.

The Guidelines underpinning this circular provide comprehensive information on the organisation and process for the deployment of special education teaching resources. In addition, the Guidelines provide information to schools on:

- the principles underpinning the special education teaching model.

- the roles and responsibilities of school management and staff.

- the problem-solving process for identification of need, planning, intervention and review of response to intervention.

2. Introduction

All children and young people, including those with special educational needs have the right to receive a quality education appropriate to their needs.

A key goal of the education system is that to the greatest extent possible, children and young people with special educational needs access and participate in their learning in mainstream educational settings.

The mainstream class or subject teachers' role is the primary support for all children and young people in their education including those with special educational needs.

Special Education Teaching (SET) hours are an additional allocated resource to schools to ensure the successful inclusion of children and young people with special educational needs in mainstream classes.

The Special Education Teaching allocation provides a total allocation for special educational teaching supports to each school, based on the school's profile.

This circular should be read in conjunction with the updated Primary guidelines or Post Primary guidelines as the Guidelines underpin this circular and should inform a whole-school approach to provision for children and young people with special educational needs.
There are many examples of good practices and initiatives in place in our education system to support the inclusion of children and young people with special educational needs in schools.

Many school leaders have implemented an effective whole-school approach to support children and young people with special educational needs, and this is particularly evident in initiatives to promote parental involvement and the voice of the child.

The application in schools of the Continuum of Support framework helps to identify and respond to children and young people's learning needs and to monitor their response to intervention.

The Indicators of Effective practice (Primary and Post Primary) along with some exemplars, which accompany the SET Guidelines demonstrate how effective school leadership has supported children and young people with special educational needs in our schools.

The revised Guidelines, underpinning this circular, replace those issued in 2017. They have been developed over the past eighteen months by the Inspectorate, The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) in conjunction with the Department. The updated Guidelines are provided to aid schools to support children and young people in mainstream classes with special educational Needs. The Guidelines incorporate existing good practices evident in schools along with feedback provided, during their development, from our educational partners.

A series of supports will be made available to assist schools in the implementation of effective practice in the following key areas:

- Introduction to The Guidelines
- The Continuum of Support Framework
- Key actions in the provision of special education teaching support
- The Student Support File and The Student Support Plan
- Effective timetabling practices in post-primary schools

3. Purpose of Special Education Teaching allocation

The special education teaching allocation is an additional resource provided to schools and is ringfenced for the sole purpose of providing additional supports to young people with special educational needs. The importance of providing well-timed, appropriate and targeted support to young people with special educational needs is crucial to their development and their long-term life prospects.

Therefore, it is critical that all schools deploy the additional special education teaching resources effectively to meet the needs of those identified in the School Provision Plan for Young People Identified with Special Educational Needs (Appendix 1 of the updated Guidelines), underpinned by the Continuum of Support framework.

The deployment of special education teaching hours allocated to a school for purposes other than intended deprives young people with special educational needs of direct access to these resources. This can impact negatively on the learning outcomes of the most vulnerable children and young people in our education system.

The allocation model provides a greater level of autonomy for schools in how to manage and deploy additional teaching support, based on the special educational needs of children and young people, rather than solely based on diagnosis of disability.

The Student Support File, which includes the Student Support Plan, is the process through which the school accounts for its decisions on the use and allocation of its special education teaching supports. The deployment of special education teaching supports is recorded in the Schedule of Deployment of Special Education Teachers (Appendix 2 in the Guidelines) to assist in tracking the use of special education teaching hours across the Continuum of Support.

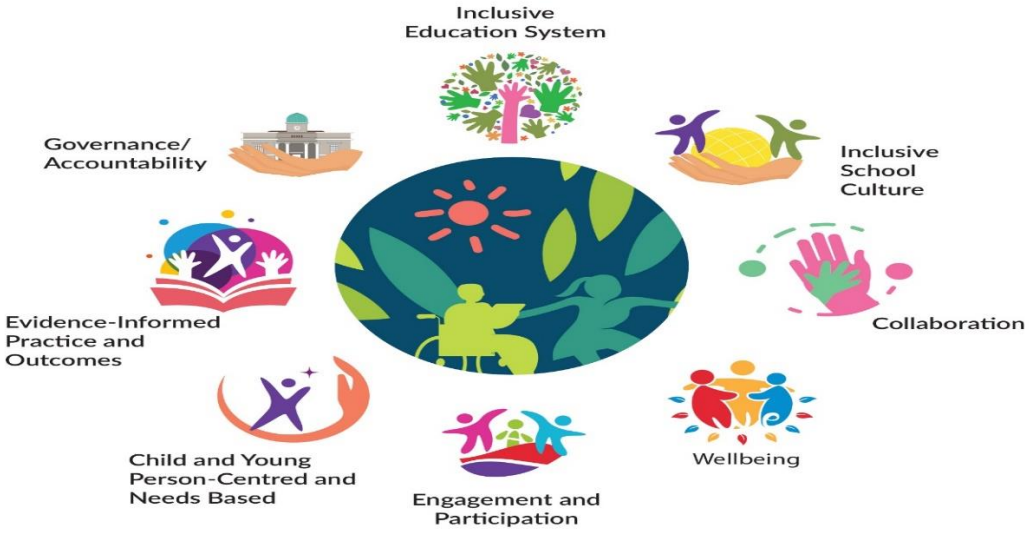
The principal should allow time for the core special education team to identify, plan, review, monitor and coordinate provision for children and young people with special educational needs. This time should include time to collaborate, liaise and communicate with parents/guardians, the child, other relevant teachers and staff, the school principal and relevant others, as part of the problem-solving process.

This time should be used appropriately to ensure that there is minimal impact on the provision of targeted and high-quality special education teaching support for children and young people with special educational needs.

The school should ensure that any hours assigned to this function is quantifiable and is proportional to the needs of the school's children and young people with special educational needs and recorded in line with Appendix 2 of the updated Guidelines.

4. Principles underpinning the SET model.

The graphic below details the eight principles which underpin the Special Education Teaching model. **These principles inform the implementation and ongoing development by schools of their systems, structures, practices and policies to support the inclusion of all children and young people, including those identified with special educational needs. As referenced within the Guidelines for Supporting children and young people with Special Educational Needs, the Department acknowledges that these principles and practices are already well embedded in many schools.**



Further detailed information on the deployment of a school's Special Education Teaching allocation and the principles underpinning it can be found at the following link Primary and Post Primary

This link is provided in a number of locations in the circular for ease of reference.

5. Operation of the Special Education Teaching provision within schools

The eight principles underpinning the Guidelines provide the basis for schools to guide the implementation and ongoing development of school systems, structures, practices and policies to support the inclusion of all young people, including those with special educational needs.

To effectively manage the operation of the Special Education Teaching allocation model, schools should adopt a whole-school, collaborative team approach to maximise positive outcomes for students.

The collaborative process involves planning, reflection, and review of existing policies and practices, including preventative proactive and universal approaches to support the purposeful inclusion of young people with special educational needs in their learning and in the life of the school community.

Collaboration involves the whole-school community, including children and young people, teachers and parents/guardians, working to effectively and proactively support young people's learning and wellbeing.

The right of the child or young person to express their views in all matters affecting them, is central to the collaborative process. Children and young people should be provided with the age-appropriate opportunities and assistance to realise this right.

The following section outlines roles and responsibilities of school staff as part of a whole-school collaborative approach to ensure that high standards are in place, and that all young people with special educational needs are fully supported within an inclusive school environment.

Role of the Board of Management/ETB

Boards of management have a statutory duty to ensure that appropriate systems and procedures are in place to ensure school resources (including grants, staffing and other resources) are managed appropriately and in a manner that provides for appropriate accountability to the relevant parties.

It is the legal obligation of individual boards of management to manage the school for the benefit of the children and young people.

The overall responsibility for the provision of education to all children and young people, including children and young people with special educational needs,

lies with the board of management. Boards of management and principals are charged with specific duties in legislation.

The board must ensure that special education teaching resources are used for their intended purpose only to support children and young people with special educational needs in their school.

Role of the Principal

The principal has the responsibility for establishing, promoting and implementing inclusive whole-school policies and procedures, which are supportive of the learning of all children and young people, including those with special educational needs. The school principal has a primary role in modelling, promoting and building whole-school staff capacity to maintain effective inclusive practice throughout the school.
The principal ensures that the board of management/ETB is kept fully informed annually on the deployment of special education teaching resources.

As with all other state-funded resources provided to a school, the board of management/ETB and school principal, have the responsibility for ensuring that these resources are utilised for their intended purpose only. This is stipulated within Section 15 of the Education Act, 1998.

Appendix A below is provided as a template that may be utilised by the principal to ensure that the board/ETB is informed annually of the allocation of SET resources. A board of management/ETB may agree their own format.

The process of organisation of special education teaching supports is led by the school principal, in collaboration with the special education teaching team, and other relevant staff. It is important that roles and responsibilities are clearly established and agreed.

Role of the Class Teacher

Class teachers adapt their teaching approaches and methodologies, and make specific accommodations for children within the class, in response to concerns arising in relation to an individual child's progress, application, communication, emotional regulation, or interaction with peers.

Class teachers have primary responsibility for the progress and care of all children in their classrooms, including children with special educational needs.

Class teachers adapt their teaching, learning and assessment approaches for children with special educational needs. This can be achieved by, for example:

- Varying the structure, content, mode of instruction and pace of lessons to ensure the meaningful participation and engagement of all children.
- Adapting lessons to take account of a child's interests.
- Matching tasks to the child's strengths, interests and needs.
- Adapting and utilising resources, including the use of visual supports, and technology.

Role of the Subject Teacher

Subject teachers make a critical contribution to the creation of a supportive and caring environment in the school for young people with special educational needs, through which these young people are affirmed in their learning and participation in the life of the school.

Within the framework of a whole-school approach to inclusion, subject teachers have primary responsibility for teaching, learning, and assessment, for all young people within their class groups, including those with special educational needs.

Section 3 of the Guidelines outlines roles and responsibilities of school staff as part of a whole-school collaborative approach to ensure that high standards are in place, and that all children and young people with special educational needs are fully supported within an inclusive school environment. The section also provides details on roles and responsibilities of: Subject Teachers (post-primary), Class Teachers (primary), Special Education Teaching Team and Special Education Teachers

Schools should refer to these to inform the organisation of special education teaching provision.

6. The process for identifying and responding to Needs across the Continuum of Support.

The Continuum of Support is a framework to guide the identification of children and young people's strengths and needs, and for monitoring response to intervention.

This framework recognises that special educational needs occur along a continuum, ranging from mild to more significant, and from transient to enduring. It recognises that children and young people require different levels of support depending on their identified educational needs, and that needs may change over time.

Section 4 of the Guidelines provides a comprehensive overview outlining how this framework helps to ensure timely and flexible allocation of support. It provides detailed guidance on provision of support at each level of the Continuum of Support.

The Student Support File provides a process for recording and collating all information in relation to the child or young person, in order to plan interventions aligned to their identified strengths, interests and needs, and to facilitate the documentation of the young person's response to intervention.

The Student Support Plan is an individualised learning plan which documents the child or young person's strengths, interests and needs, as well as the priority learning needs that have been agreed as the basis for targets and interventions.

Examples of Student Support Plans and Files for primary and post-primary schools are included in Supporting Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs: Indicators for Effective Practice.

Further information and guidance in relation to the implementation of support plans can be found at the following links:
Primary Schools and Post Primary

7. Correct deployment of SET resources

Schools must use their special education teaching allocation in its entirety to support all children and young people with special educational needs identified as requiring support in the School Provision Plan for Young People Identified with Special Educational Needs (appendix 1 of the Guidelines).

Schools are required to keep a record of deployment of special education teachers. A template for recording deployment is included in Appendix 2 of the Guidelines.

8. Supports for schools.

A range of supports are available from the Department, NCSE and NEPS to assist schools in supporting children and young people with special educational needs.

These include:

Department of Education provides resources and guidance in relation to special educational need within schools.

The NCSE provides support to schools through their regional teams, Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs), Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) and In-school support.

Further information in relation to the above supports can be found at National Council for Special Education – Working to deliver a better special education service – Working to deliver a better special education service (ncse.ie)

NEPS psychologists work with schools to support the wellbeing, inclusion, learning and social and emotional development of children and young people. Educational Psychologists from NEPS work with schools using a problem-solving model to help schools identify need, and interventions to support those needs.

A useful reference of the key supports is available in the Appendix 3 of the Guidelines.

9. Process for potential cases of incorrect deployment of SET resources.

It is recognised that the vast majority of schools deploy their Special Education Teaching resources effectively.

Each year the Department is advised of a small number of potential cases where the allocation of SET hours to individual schools is not being utilised effectively or in its entirety to support children and young people identified with special educational needs.

It is incumbent on the Department to investigate all such reports.

Examples of incorrect deployment reported recently to the Department.

Some of the incidences reported to the Department in the past school year included the following:

- The special education teaching resources were not being used to provide additional teaching support to children and young people with the greatest level of need in schools. (For clarity additional teaching support would incorporate the time to identify, plan, review, monitor and coordinate provision for children and young people with special educational needs).
- The special education teaching hours being used to reduce the pupil: teacher ratio and to create smaller class groups.
- Special education teaching hours being used to provide the curriculum and subjects to young people who do not have special educational needs.
- Whole-class curricular responsibilities being assigned to a Special Education Teacher on a consistent basis e.g., Special education teachers being solely responsible for teaching mathematics to mainstream class groups.

It should be noted that incorrect deployment refers to the **systematic and consistent deployment of special education teachers in roles not directly supporting those children and young people with identified learning needs outlined in student support files.**
The department has in place, a long-standing process which is followed when we receive such a report. For information purposes it can be accessed here

Appendix A
Sample form for Principal's Confirmation to Board/ETB of Correct Deployment of SET Resources

School headed notepaper

From: (The Principal Name)

To: Chairperson of the board of management/ETB

School Name:

Roll No:

School year 20 /20

I hereby confirm that:

- All resources provided to support children and young people with special educational needs are used for their intended purpose in accordance with circular letter 0064/2024 (and the associated guidance).

Signed:_____ Date:_____

Special Education
December 2024