



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta  
um Oideachas Speisialta  
National Council  
for Special Education

# Parent Guide: Understanding the NCSE SNA Review Guidelines (2026/27)





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National Council  
for Special Education

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# Supporting students

## Foreword

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I am delighted to share these updated NCSE Special Needs Assistant (SNA) Guidelines with you. These guidelines have been carefully developed to support schools in meeting the needs of children and young people in a way that is thoughtful, responsive and grounded in good practice.

As a parent or guardian, you will know the importance of feeling that your child is safe, supported and truly included in their school community. Special Needs Assistants play a vital role in making this happen every day. Beyond providing care, SNAs offer reassurance, consistency and encouragement. They help children to feel secure, to participate fully in school life, and to develop a strong sense of belonging.

These guidelines also recognise the inspired leadership and commitment of schools, who work continuously to create inclusive environments where every child can truly learn, grow and thrive.

A central message within this guidance is the importance of supporting your child's independence. While support is essential, it is equally important that children are given opportunities to develop their confidence, skills and autonomy. This helps them not only during their time in school, but also as they prepare for life beyond it.

To support this, the guidelines focus on:

- Understanding each child's individual needs
- Using supports in a way that is flexible and responsive across the school day
- Continuing to develop school practice so that it meets the needs of all students

This is a shared effort. Everyone involved in education—school leaders, teachers, SNAs and support services—has a role to play in ensuring that children are supported in ways that allow them to grow, develop and reach their full potential. I thank school leaders and school staff across the country for their ongoing work. This daily work to support students, promote wellbeing and nurture development makes a real difference to children and families.

Finally, I commend your pivotal role as parents and guardians in this shared effort in promoting inclusive education for your students in our schools.



*John Kearney*

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**John Kearney**  
Chief Executive Officer

This guide explains how special needs assistant (SNA) support is reviewed in schools and how parents can be involved in the process.

## What is an SNA?

- A special needs assistant (SNA) supports students who require assistance with additional care needs during the school day.
- SNAs do not teach the curriculum. Their role is to help students with core care needs participate safely, comfortably, and as independently as possible in school life alongside their peers.
- SNA support is allocated to the school rather than to an individual student. Schools decide how SNA support is shared among students based on identified care needs.
- Students with the highest level of need receive the highest level of support.
- The school is responsible for the deployment and management of SNAs.

## What Supports Can an SNA Help With?

An SNA may support a student with:

- What Supports Can an SNA Help With
- Feeding
- Toileting and general hygiene
- Caring for a Student with a Catheter
- Mobility
- Medical Care Needs (non nursing)
- Support for students who are blind/vision/sensory impaired (BVISI) or deaf/hard of hearing (DHH).
- Regulation and Behaviour
- Communication
- Assist with supervision



# Parental Involvement

# Caring and supporting



## How Schools Support Students

Schools use a team approach to support students. This may include:

- The class teacher
- The special education teacher (SET)
- The special needs assistant (SNA)
- Parents/guardians
- The student's voice, where appropriate

Students who receive special education teaching support and/or SNA support should have a Student Support Plan (SSP).

The SSP sets goals and supports based on the student's strengths, needs, and current level of development. Targets should be SMART:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Relevant
- Time-bound

These plans should be reviewed regularly to monitor progress and adjust supports where needed.

Parents are encouraged to take part in meetings and share information about their child's needs and progress.

Where appropriate, students should also have opportunities to contribute to their SSP and share their views.

## Who Does What?

### Class Teacher

- Responsible for the teaching and learning of all students in the class
- Monitors the student's progress and participation in class

### Special Education Teacher (SET)

- Provides additional teaching support and targeted interventions
- Supports students in areas such as literacy, numeracy, social skills, emotional regulation, and behaviour

### Special Needs Assistant (SNA)

- Supports students with identified care needs
- May assist with additional support needs once core care needs across the school are met
- Does not replace the teacher or provide teaching instruction

## Levels of Support in School

Schools provide support at different levels depending on students' needs.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Support available to all students across the school.	Additional support for students who need some extra help.	More intensive and individualised support for students with the highest level of need.

More intensive and individualised support for students with the highest level of need.

Students with the greatest level of care needs should receive the highest level of support.

## Helping Students Become More Independent

An important part of SNA support is helping students build independence and life skills over time.

Schools aim to:

- Encourage independence where possible
- Support students to participate in classroom and school activities
- Set age-appropriate goals for developing skills and confidence
- Meet the child or young person at their current developmental stage

# Meeting students needs



## How SNA Reviews Work

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) reviews SNA supports to ensure schools have the appropriate level of support to meet students' care needs.

Reviews may:

- Be requested by the school
- Be carried out by the NCSE as part of the regular review cycle (generally at least every three years)

The local SENO (special educational needs organiser) gathers information from the school and families and submits it to an NCSE review panel.

## What Information is Needed?

The review process may include:

- Parent/guardian consent forms
- Parent and student questionnaires
- Student Support Plans (SSPs)
- Medical or professional reports (where relevant)
- School care needs forms

All of this information is collected by the school and shared with the local SENO during their visit to the school. The information is collated into the school record form and presented to the SNA review panel.

The SNA review panel makes the decision on the level of support required in the school.

The school is informed of the outcome in writing.

[Contact your local SENO](#)

## Parent and Student Voice Matters

Parents and students are an important part of the review process.

Parents can:

- Share information about their child's needs by completing questionnaires
- Contact the school or SENO directly if they feel the questionnaire does not fully reflect their child's needs
- Participate in meetings and discussions about supports

Students are also encouraged to share their views where appropriate.

## Appeals

If a school disagrees with an SNA allocation decision following a formal review, the school may appeal the decision.

If there is new or updated information about a student's needs, the school can contact the SENO to request a further review.

## Key Messages for Parents

- SNA support is based on a student's care needs and may change over time as those needs change.
- SNAs are not teachers and do not provide teaching instruction.
- Supporting a child or young person in school involves a whole-school approach, including the class teacher, SET teacher, SNA, parents, and the student where appropriate.
- All interventions and targets should be included in the Student Support Plan (SSP).
- Targets should reflect the student's current needs and stage of development and should be reviewed regularly.
- The NCSE carries out SNA reviews to help ensure students' core care needs are appropriately supported in schools.

Parents play an important role by:

- Sharing information about their child
- Working in partnership with the school
- Taking part in questionnaires and meetings as part of the review process

The overall goal is to ensure every child receives the right support to participate fully, safely, and confidently in school life.

