



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
um Oideachas Speisialta
National Council
for Special Education

NCSE SNA Review Guidelines for Schools





**An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
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National Council
for Special Education

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Summary

Special Needs Assistant (SNA) Review

- SNA reviews take place throughout the school year.
- As children and young people's care needs change over time, SNA allocations are regularly reviewed to ensure supports remain appropriate to meet the care needs of children and young people.
- It is important that children and young people 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.

Allocation of SNAs to schools

- A School's SNA allocation generally remains unchanged, except where an increase is approved following an SNA review or the sanctioning of a special class for next year. SNAs are allocated to schools based on overall core care needs rather than being assigned to individual children. It is the responsibility of the school to deploy SNAs where the level of need is greatest, ensuring students with the highest needs receive the appropriate level of support.
- There are three outcomes to a review an increase, no change or surplus outcome.
- Surplus posts may occasionally be identified in schools; however, any resulting reductions are implemented only at the end of the school year. This ensures that schools are given sufficient time to make necessary adjustments and to account for the incoming needs of new students.

Role of the SNA

SNAs do not have a teaching role. Their duties focus on supporting students' core care and access needs, including:

- Feeding support
- Toileting and general hygiene
- Assisting students with catheter care (non-medical/nursing tasks as appropriate)
- Mobility support
- Assisting with medical care needs (non-nursing support)
- Supporting students who are blind, visually impaired, deaf, or hard of hearing
- Supporting regulation and behaviour needs
- Communication support
- Assisting with supervision

Team Approach

- The SNA is part of the school support team, working alongside the class teacher and special education teacher. They work under the direction of the teacher, in line with individual student support plans.

Student and Parent Voice

- The views of parents and students are an important part of the support and review process.

Foreword

Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) make a significant contribution to inclusive education in schools throughout this country. I am therefore delighted to announce the publication of the updated NCSE Special Needs Assistant (SNA) Guidelines, developed to support schools in providing high-quality, responsive support to children and young people across our education system.

These guidelines reflect both the evolving needs of students and the continued commitment across the sector to ensuring that every child is supported to participate fully in school life and to realise their full potential.

Central to this commitment is the invaluable work of Special Needs Assistants in our schools. SNAs play a vital role not only in supporting care needs, but in providing reassurance, consistency and connection for children throughout the school day. Their presence helps foster a strong sense of belonging, ensuring that children feel safe, included and valued as members of their school community.

This guidance also recognises the critical leadership and teaching expertise of our schools, whose commitment to inclusive practice continues to shape environments where all children can thrive.

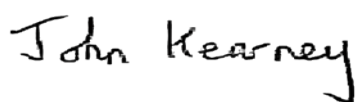
A key focus within these guidelines is the importance of supporting the development of children's independence. While care and support are essential, our collective aim is to enable children and young people to grow in confidence, capability and autonomy—both during their time in school and as they prepare for life beyond it.

In this context, the guidelines emphasise:

- The importance of clearly identifying and responding to student need
- The flexible, agile and responsive deployment of SNAs across the school community
- The ongoing development of school practice, ensuring it reflects the diverse and changing needs of all learners

This is not the responsibility of any one role alone. It is a shared responsibility across the education sector—school leaders, teachers, SNAs and all those supporting children—to continually develop our practice, to respond to children in ways that maximise their growth, and to ensure each child has the opportunity to reach their fullest potential.

I would like to sincerely thank our inspiring school leaders, accomplished teaching and SNA staff across the country for their dedication and professionalism. This crucially important and uplifting work done each day to support school communities, promote wellbeing, and nurture the development of all children is deeply valued and greatly appreciated.



John Kearney
Chief Executive Officer



The NCSE SNA Review Guidelines are for schools who will be reviewed during the coming academic year 2026/27.

The Guidelines are for school leaders and school communities who will have an NCSE SNA review during the year

The Guidelines aim to support a school's understanding of an SNA review and answers the following questions and more:

- How will my school's allocation be assessed?
- What happens during a review?
- How are reviews carried out?
- How are decisions made?
- Who makes the decision?
- What changes will occur after our review takes place?
- When will I know the outcome of our review?
- If I have questions before during or after a review, where do I go?
- How do I appeal an outcome or the process itself?

You will read key words and acronyms in the guidelines so the following brief glossary will assist you to understand those that are most important:

NCSE – National Council for Special Education

DEY – Department of Education and Youth

SET – Special Education Teacher

CCN – Core Care needs

COS – Continuum of Support

SSP – Student Support Plan

SMART Targets – Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely

SERC – Special Education Review Committee



1.0 What are the NCSE Special Needs Assistant Reviews?

The NCSE special needs assistant (SNA) Review is a thorough review of each school's children and young people's care needs. It makes sure schools have the right SNA support to support their care needs, attendance and participation in school. These guidelines explain how the reviews will work for school patrons, boards, leaders and staff. The National Council for Special Education will carry out the reviews in the 2026/27 school year.

The NCSE reviews how special needs assistants (SNAs) are assigned in schools, in line with Department of Education and Youth circulars, to make sure that SNA support goes to the students who need it most.

The review process is child centred, focuses on the needs of each child and helps schools meet students' care needs. SNAs support students with daily living skills, such as toileting, moving around, and emotional regulation in line with their Student Support Plan.

SNA support shall always be at a level that will ensure that students' needs are met without impacting on the development of the student's independent living and functional skills.

While many students progress to greater independence some others may require increased SNA support. Therefore, the level of SNA support in a school may fluctuate especially when students move to post primary school.

For these reasons the SNA Review is essential to ensure this valuable support is deployed effectively and efficiently to meet the needs of students. School boards of management and school principals have responsibility for deploying SNA resources flexibly within the school to meet identified needs, ensuring the effective and efficient use of available supports.

1.1 Whole school approach and supports

A whole-school approach means that everyone in the school, works together to support students' overall needs. In mainstream schools, this support is provided by the class teacher, the special education teacher (SET), and the special needs assistant (SNA). Each person plays their own role and works together as part of a team.

- Students with additional needs are supported through a Student Support Plan (SSP). This plan outlines specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) targets tailored to the student's individual needs. Depending on the nature of these targets, responsibility for their implementation may be shared among members of the school staff, including the class teacher, SET, and SNA, each with clearly defined roles in supporting the student's progress.
- Targets are designed to meet the child at their current level of development and are subject to ongoing review and adjustment. They are reviewed regularly and changed as needed to match the student's evolving care needs and progress.
- Parental involvement is critical in the Student Support Planning process for their child. Parents should be included by the school in SSP meetings, and their views, along with those of their child where appropriate, should shape and inform the development, implementation, and review of the plan.

1.2 Roles and responsibilities of Class Teacher, Special Education Teacher and Special Needs Assistant.

The role of the class teacher and the special education teacher (SET) in mainstream schools is explained in the Department of Education and Youth Circular 64/2024 which sets out how the current special education teaching model works. The role of the special needs assistant (SNA) is set out in Department of Education and Youth Circular 0032/2026. Together, these documents explain how additional teaching and care support should be provided in mainstream schools.

The Class Teacher

- (a) The class teacher has primary responsibility for the learning, teaching, and progress of all students in their class, including students with special educational needs.
- Providing high-quality teaching that is adapted to meet the different needs of all students
 - Identifying students who may require additional support and implementing early intervention within the classroom
 - Operating within the Continuum of Support (Classroom Support, School Support, School Support Plus)
 - Primary: Primary- Continuum of Support
 - Post Primary: Post Primary-Continuum of Support
 - Developing, implementing, and reviewing Student Support Plans (SSPs), including SMART targets where appropriate Student Support Plans examples
 - Monitoring and recording student progress on an ongoing basis
 - Working together with the special education teacher (SET), special needs assistant (SNA), parents/guardians and other professionals
 - Creating a classroom where all students are included, can take part in learning and know they belong.
 - Ensuring that teaching approaches are suited to the universal and diverse needs of learners.

Special Education Teacher

The Special Education Teacher (SET) works to meet the identified priority learning needs of students, particularly in areas such as literacy, numeracy, social and emotional skills. This teacher ensures that supports are responsive and targeted to each child or young person and are regularly reviewed.

- Provides targeted teaching support (in-class, small group, or individual)
- Assesses, monitors, and reviews student progress
- Develops and implements Student Support Plans with SMART targets
- Works together with class teachers, SNAs, parents and relevant professionals
- Supports the class teacher to create learning environments that are inclusive to all children and young people.

Special Needs Assistant

The SNA is an important member of the school community that works together to create and maintain a positive, productive, safe and inclusive learning environment for all students.

- SNAs are recruited specifically to assist and support students with special educational needs in providing necessary non-teaching supports.
- The SNAs priority is to provide support for the student's core care needs in line with

Department of Education and Youth circulars.

- Once students core care needs are met, the SNA if required can take on additional student support duties, in line with the provisions of the circular, and as directed by of the principal
- The NCSE recognises that on completion of core care duties, SNAs can carry out other appropriate student support duties which are listed below:
 - Support for learning
 - Therapy supports
 - Transitions
 - Other student support duties
- As per circular 0032/2026, student support duties will not qualify the school for additional SNA posts.

2.0 Overarching Principles of an NCSE Review

All reviews are carried out by a Special Education Needs Organiser with the following considerations in mind:

- Does the current allocation meet the children/young people's care needs with the appropriate level of support?
- Is the greatest level of support aligned to the greatest level of need?
- Does school practice operate a multi-tiered approach to supporting children and young people so that children have access to multiple layers of support to address their needs?
- Do school-based practices support each child or young person's right to be independent, have their views represented, support their agency and make their own choices?
- Are supports, age appropriate?
- Is there appropriate student support planning, including consistent and evolving SMART targets?
- Is the right of the child to be taught by their class or subject teacher and/or Special education teacher clear in school practice?
- Are the right supports aligned correctly to a child's support need and put in place for through the student support plan?
- Has the school made changes to the school environment so that the child or young person can be as independent as possible in the school setting?
- Is every effort made to include all children in all school activities?
- Does the school utilise whole-school policies in relation to health and safety, medical care needs, and intimate care policies?
- Are children and young people represented and understood based on their strengths and not just their difficulties.
- Does the class teacher direct all planning and teaching for all children and young people?
- Are children with care needs provided the same access to their class or subject teacher for their learning as any child or young person in their school community?
- Are all efforts made to ensure that children are not removed from their classroom social environment unless appropriate evidence-based practice measures have been adopted?

2.1 The Independence of Children and Young People

Independence, Voice Agency and Autonomy



- Circular 0032/2026 emphasises the important role that SNAs play as members of the whole school community. They help students to become more independent and can contribute to the students' overall wellbeing.
- An NCSE Review considers appropriate student independence targets with goals suited to their age. Circular 0032/2026 makes it clear, that as part of whole school planning, schools should encourage and empower students to take on manageable tasks and build their confidence and self-esteem.
- The circular indicates that SNAs should support students to develop independent living skills, such as using the toilet, moving in their environment, regulation and managing their emotions when needed.
- Schools must make sure that students' needs are met, while also helping them become as independent as possible and to learn the skills they need for their lives.
- Strategies and staff roles and responsibilities in supporting the student should be set out in the student's individual student support plan. This plan should be reviewed and monitored regularly. These plans will be reviewed as a core component of an NCSE SNA review.

2.2 How a school's allocation is Determined

- The NCSE determines a school's SNA allocation and notifies schools annually.
 - (a) to meet the core care needs of all students in line with the continuum of support.
 - (b) In making this determination the NCSE adopts a holistic appraisal of SNA duties across school life taking a broad and balanced view in line with the continuum of support. as they relate to school life and in line with the continuum.

2.2.1 Core Care Needs – What are they?

Core care needs	
Care Need	Duties
Feeding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeding a student who cannot physically feed themselves. • Peg or tube feeding. • Encouraging self-feeding in line with recommendations and any clinician guidelines provided to the school. • Supervising a student who has a Feeding Eating Drinking Swallowing (FEDS) care plan owing to a risk of choking/aspiration.
Toileting and general hygiene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging and supporting a student who cannot independently self-toilet. • Caring for students who are incontinent (wearing nappies or other continence wear). • Changing clothes/attending to personal hygiene after toileting ‘accidents’ in conjunction with student’s toileting programme. • Escorting a young or vulnerable student to the toilet, where necessary.
Caring for a Student with a Catheter	<p>SNA’s provide vital support to students in managing their urinary catheters. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing clean intermittent catheter (CIC) • Inserting/removing catheter where student cannot self-catheterise. • Emptying catheter bags. • Ensuring the bag remains safe. • Maintaining student hygiene to prevent infection.
Mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assisting a student whose mobility is compromised including where the student requires a wheelchair, walker or other aid. • Operating hoists or other equipment where a student requires assistance with moving or lifting, in line with appropriate training and direction. • Assisting a student where such support is required as directed by principal or delegate, including assisting students who are blind/vision impaired with mobility throughout the school day as required.
Medical Care Needs (non-nursing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting significant care needs associated with specific medical or health conditions, as detailed in the student support plan and subject to provision of appropriate training. • Assisting a student where adult assistance is required to administer medicine.

Care Need	Duties
Support for students who are blind/vision/sensory impaired (BVISI) or deaf/hard of hearing (DHH).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting access to the curriculum both in class and through the preparation of materials for students who are BVISI or DHH. Supporting students using assistive technology equipment to access the curriculum. Working with students to facilitate their communication with staff members and their peers in the school community and ensuring access to all appropriate areas of the school.
Regulation and Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support students at a time of dysregulation or when engaging in a behaviour of concern under the direction of the teacher/special education teacher or principal.
Communication	<p>Under the direction of the teacher:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting non-speaking and minimally-speaking students to express themselves using their preferred communication methods, such as sign language, gestures, or augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). Providing communication support tailored to students with complex and profound needs.
Assist with supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assisting teachers with supervision during recreation time, assembly and dispersal times (arriving and departing school) as directed by the principal or delegate. Assisting with supervision on a temporary basis, in exceptional circumstances where there are legitimate reasons that existing teaching resources cannot facilitate such supervision during that period.

2.2.2 What are Student Support Duties

The NCSE recognises that on completion of core care duties, SNAs can carry out other appropriate student support duties which are listed below. As per circular 0032/2026, these duties will not qualify the school for additional SNA posts.

1. Support for learning

2. Therapy supports

3. Transitions

4. Other student support duties

- Holistic Appraisal of SNA duties and School Life
 - The NCSE decides how much SNA support a school needs to meet the core care needs of all children and young people in line with the continuum of support. In making this decision, the NCSE adopts a holistic appraisal of SNA duties as they relate to school life and in line with the continuum of support. In doing this, the NCSE will consider:

- Have the school available SNA support that can be deployed across the school?
- Are student independence targets and enduring outcomes clear in student support planning?
- What is the balance between SNAs spending right amount of time on students' core care needs and other duties?
- Are there school factors that may mean bespoke support is required such as DEIS status, or being a new or developing school
- Are there both unique student specific and school specific circumstances i.e. scenarios where alternative support would not be appropriate
- Has the school enrolled students with special class or school recommendations where students continue to have significant needs in spite of reasonable accommodation and supportive inclusive practices?
- Have schools have demonstrated targeted student independence goals and prolonged practices and where unique student support needs prevail?
- Is this a special school facing serious incidents or unique circumstances that can be considered exceptional to ordinary school life that cannot be managed through the school's current allocation or deployment practices?
- Is this a special schools and special classes where student support needs present in spite of flexible SNA deployment, appropriate school practice, NCSE Interdisciplinary and wider agency multi-disciplinary support interventions?
- Does this school require short term support to assist students re-integrate into school life successfully, e.g newly acquired brain injury, the on-set of life limiting support requirements, a prolonged absence?

Link: [circular 0032/2026](#)



3.0 The SNA Review Process – How it Works

The SNA Review Process is generally carried out in-person by a special education needs organiser in the school. The review date is scheduled with the school and all required documents are indicated to the school well ahead of time.

For Primary and Post Primary schools, allocations are composed of a combination of the following:

1. The core care needs profile of designated children and
2. The allocation to all special classes and enrolment numbers – For example in an autism class 1 SNA is assigned to meet the needs of three children and 2 SNAs for four or more children.

Where the level of need exceeds the baseline provision, the school can redeploy from the overall school allocation.

Where this does not meet student needs, the NCSE will conduct a full review taking the needs of all children across the school into account.

Special school allocations include:

1. The profile of enrolled children in line with Special Education Review Committee allocations
Link: [SERC Breakdowns](#)
2. The additional care needs beyond the SERC allocations

Where the SERC allocation does not meet the care needs of the children in the school, NCSE will conduct a whole school review.

3.1 SNA Reviews

The NCSE reviews a school's SNA allocation in one of two circumstances.

Where a school seeks additional SNA support, the NCSE will make an appointment to visit the school and review their overall allocation. The NCSE also completes reviews of all schools' allocations on a national level over a three-yearly basis. Reviews occur therefore as one of the following:

1. A school is seeking additional SNA support.
2. The NCSE has selected the review on a scheduled basis.

A school may request a review of its SNA allocation under the following circumstances:

- (i) Where a school thinks that additional SNA support is required due to newly identified core care needs among students, it should first review, reprioritise and redeploy its existing SNA allocation. Where additional support is still required following this process, a school-led review may be undertaken.
- (ii) Where a school considers that it has excess SNA capacity and that a reduced allocation would still enable it to adequately and safely meet the core care needs of the relevant students, it should adjust its allocation accordingly.
 - (a) In cases outlined under (ii), a comprehensive review must be undertaken to accurately establish the current profile of core care needs prior to any reduction in SNA allocation.
 - (b) NCSE Scheduled Reviews

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) may independently conduct reviews, including but not limited to the following scenarios:

- Schools will be reviewed at a minimum of once within a three-year period.
- Schools with SNA allocations exceeding SERC within special classes (Historically above SERC allocations).

- Schools where a number of students have transitioned from mainstream settings into special classes
- Schools selected by the NCSE for review
- Situations involving Level 3 students transitioning to alternative educational placements, including special schools, special classes, or post-primary Schools.

(c) A review can be completed in three ways:

Review Types



A full review in the school is carried out if no review has been carried out in the previous school year.

- A focused review is where a review has been carried out in the previous school year and the request for review arises on foot of a small number of students or a small change in care needs profile of the school.
- An administrative review is where a review has been carried out in the previous school year and there has been little change to the school's care needs profile.
 - The type of review to be conducted will be determined by the SENO assigned to the school.

3.2 Phases of the SNA Review Process

The SNA Review Process has two phases. In phase 1, the local Special Education Needs Organiser carries out a review which include looking at:

- The core care needs of students in the school
- The school's SNA deployment practice
- Details on school practices
 - Schools will receive a guidance document to assist them with the process

In Phase 2, the outcome of the review is considered by the Review Panel. Each panel consists of five Team Managers and one National Development or Specialist Lead. The panels meet bi-weekly during the SNA review process to:

- Analyses the information and evidence gathered and presented by the SENO
- Determine of the review outcome, taking into account the national profile of need
- Ensuring that children with the greatest level of need receive the highest level of support, in line with national budgetary parameters
- Final responsibility for the determination of outcomes rests with the NCSE SNA Review Panel
- Schools are only informed of the outcome after both phases are fully completed
- Each school receives a rationale explaining the decision of the review panel
- This rationale may be discussed with the local SENO, who can advise the school on appropriate deployment of resources
- Regional teams may also provide cluster-based support to schools regarding resource deployment
- Schools are advised to contact their local SENO to access this support

3.3 The Review Process for Schools

Before the Review

- The school is informed in writing by the SENO of the date and time of the review.
- Parents/guardians are informed about the review process.
- Consent forms and parent/student questionnaires are shared with families.
- The school ensures all Student Support Files are up to date, including:
 - Student Support Plans (SSPs) with SMART targets included.
 - Care plans
 - Relevant professional reports where applicable
- The school completes the relevant documentation:
 - School Care Needs Record Form
 - Special Class Record Form (where applicable)
 - Special school Record Form (where applicable)
- The following documents are shared with the SENO in advance where possible:
 - Parent/guardian consent forms
 - Parent and student questionnaires
 - Student Support Plans
 - Care plans and medical plans
 - Relevant professional reports
 - Inclusive reflection practice documents (where relevant)

During the Review

- The SENO visits the school to carry out the review process.
- The review may include:
 - Meetings with the principal and relevant staff members
 - Consultation with:

- Class teachers
 - Special education teachers (SETs)
 - Special needs assistants (SNAs)
- The SENO may carry out observations:
 - In classrooms
 - Around the school environment
 - In playground and recreational areas
 - Of accessibility arrangements and school facilities
- The SENO reviews:
 - Student Support Plans and SMART targets
 - School deployment of SNAs
 - Whole-school practices and supports
 - Documentation relating to students' core care needs
- Observations are completed respectfully and only where appropriate, always ensuring student dignity and wellbeing.

After the Review

- The SENO completes the review documentation and prepares a report for the NCSE SNA Review Panel.
- The SNA Review Panel considers:
 - Student care needs
 - School deployment practices
 - Whole-school supports and practices
- The school is informed of the outcome once the review process is complete.
- A written rationale for the decision is shared with the school.
- Schools may discuss the outcome and resource deployment with their local SENO.
- Where applicable, schools may access additional support from regional NCSE teams.
- If dissatisfied with the outcome, schools may appeal through the NCSE Appeals Process within the specified timeframe.

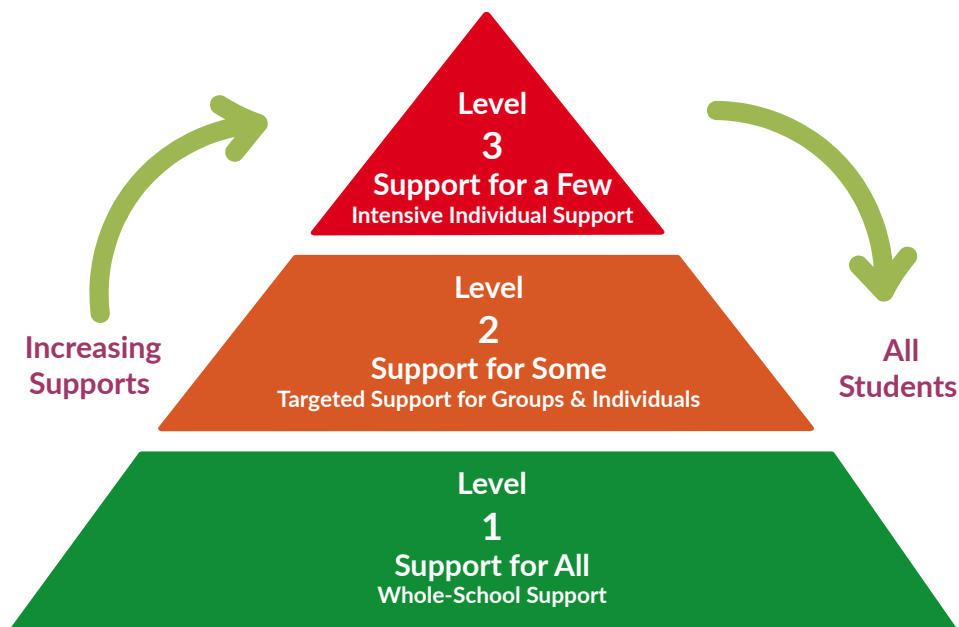
3.4 How Schools show support is needed

Schools demonstrate students' needs by completing the School Care Needs Record Form. This form is based on SSPs (student support plans) which outline students presenting with core care needs in line with the Continuum of Support.

- The Continuum of Support is a tiered, flexible framework designed to ensure the appropriate level of support is provided to children and young people at the right time.
- It ranges from universal supports for all students to targeted, intensive, or specialist supports for those with higher levels of need.
- It promotes proactive, tailored, and responsive intervention to prevent escalation of need.

(i). Continuum of Support (CoS)

Continuum of Support



Care needs are aligned with the Continuum of Support as follows:

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Support for All: Whole-school supports	Support for Some: Targeted supports for groups or individuals requiring additional assistance	Support for a Few: Intensive, individualised supports

- Core care needs may:
 - Range from moderate to significant in nature
 - Be transient or enduring
 - Require varying levels of support depending on individual need

(ii). Nature of Support Required

- Some children require whole-school approaches to meet their core care needs
- Some children require intermittent support at various points during the school day
- Some children require intensive, individualised support
- Support is allocated based on assessed level of need
- Children with the greatest level of need should receive the greatest level of support
- The Continuum of Support ensures interventions are incremental, progressing from class-based supports to more intensive, individualised interventions

(iii). The NCSE Review and Assessment Process

- SENOs review information provided by schools, including student need, whole-school deployment practices, documentation, and parental/student input
- SENOs may consult with school leadership teams, teachers, special education teachers, and SNAs. SENOs will meet with SNAs on an individual basis.
- SENOs prepare a detailed report for the SNA Review Panel
- Following Phase 2 of the SNA Review Panel process, schools are allocated a whole-school quantum of SNA allocation
- Allocations are not made on an individual pupil basis

(iv). Administrative Requirements

- Schools must ensure all documentation and consent forms are fully completed and available for the SENO on the day of the review.
- In addition, there will be a Term 3 application window for schools to apply for support for students with core care needs, starting in September 2027.

3.5 Documentation Required for an SNA Review

(i). Documentation to be Shared with the SENO in Advance of the SNA Review

- Consent Forms signed by parent/guardian
 - Only students who have their parent/guardian written consent can be included in the review process.
- SSP Student Support Plans (SSPs) for level 2 and 3 students on the care needs register
 - A student should have a single Student Support File that includes the care plan section of the SSP. The Student Support File should be one comprehensive document containing all of the student's records, along with the Care Plan (as found on the NCSE website)
- School Care Needs Record Form
 - Mainstream students only
- Special Class Record Form
 - For **special class students only**, and only in cases where additional support is being requested for the special class or has already been allocated to it
- Special school Record Form
 - Special school students only.
- Parental and Student Questionnaire if available

(ii). Documentation Required to be Made Available During the SNA Review (if not provided previously)

- Parent/guardian consent forms
- Parental and Student Questionnaires if available
- Student Support Plans for students for level 2 and 3 students on the care needs register
- Medical or care plans (where applicable)
- Professional reports (where available and relevant)
- Inclusive reflection practice document (where relevant)
- Any additional supplementary documentation relevant to the review process
- Only students who have their parent/guardian written consent can be included in the review process.

3.6 Parental and Student Voice

- The NCSE parental and student questionnaire is a critical input to understanding the core care needs of children and young people.
- NCSE asks of all schools that all parental and student questionnaires are completed ahead of the NCSE review and shared with the SENO.
- NCSE also welcomes student voice where appropriate and possible and submitted as part of the review
- NCSE also understands that parents and young people may not be in a position to offer their input but will strive to understand their child or young person's needs to their best advantage.
- If a parent feels that their views are not fully captured through the parent/student Questionnaire, the NCSE welcomes parents to make direct contact with them to share their perspectives.

3.7 The Role of Observation during an SNA review

- As part of the information gathering process, the SENO may carry out an observation of the school environment to understand the school size, classroom size and layout, the location of toilets, accessibility (ramps, lifts, etc) and if there is a split campus, etc.
- Observation may be used as one part of the information-gathering process. It may not be necessary or appropriate to observe every student.
- Relevant documentation will be examined to allow the SENO to determine the needs of each student and determine their eligibility for SNA support.
- SENOS will consult:
 - Student Support Plans (SSP's) and SMART targets for developing independence
 - Whilst not required professional reports where available can provide important information in relation to a student's primary care needs and will be consulted on this basis.
- The decision on the students to be included in the review and/or observed will be determined by the SENO. Level 1 students are not included as part of an SNA review as their needs are to be met at whole school level.

Observing students within the environment:

It may be helpful to observe students in the school setting where:

- The level of care needs is not easily verifiable from the SSP.
- The student is new to the school, and care needs are not easily verifiable from the SSP.

It may not be necessary to observe the student in the school setting where:

- The student is presenting with Level 3 care needs which are well and clearly documented in the SSP.
- The student has intermittent care needs, such as a chronic health condition, which are not observable.
- The student may become distressed by a visitor to the room.
- The needs of the student are intimate or sensitive in nature e.g. where a student requires intimate care, or where the student is presenting with self-injurious behaviour or is distressed. Care must be taken to preserve the dignity of students.



3.8 NCSE recording of Student Need, School SNA Deployment Practices and School Practice

- The NCSE decides a school's SNA allocation to meet the core care needs of all students in line with the continuum of support. In making this decision, the NCSE adopts a holistic appraisal of SNA duties as they relate to school life and in line with the continuum. Based on the below headings:
 - Student Need
 - School SNA Deployment Practices
 - School Practice
 - An SNA Review document will be shared with schools.

3.9 Deployment of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)

- The underlying principles of the deployment of special needs assistants (SNAs) remain unchanged.
- The school Principal holds responsibility for identifying students' core care needs and for the effective deployment of SNA support. This includes ensuring that students with the highest level of core care needs receive the greatest level of support.
- Not all students with a disability require access to SNA support. Allocation is determined by the nature and extent of a student's core care needs, rather than by diagnosis or category of disability.
- As a guiding principle, it is recommended that one SNA be allocated to any classroom where a student with Level 3 needs is present. Students identified as Level 2 should have intermittent access to SNA support, based on assessed needs. This support may be provided by the SNA assigned to a classroom with a Level 3 student or through additional allocation, depending on the overall profile of core care needs within the school.

- SNA timetables should be developed but must remain flexible throughout the school day and across the school year. This flexibility reflects the central aim of the SNA role: to promote student independence. As student needs evolve, the Principal is expected to review targets and ensure that students are progressing towards greater independence. Schools must regularly review, prioritise, and redeploy SNA support to ensure that students with the greatest level of need continue to receive the highest level of assistance.
- SNA support must be clearly documented in the Student Support Plan (SSP) and include SMART targets. This documentation should outline:
 - The specific core care needs identified
 - The intended outcomes of the support provided
 - The role of the SNA in supporting these outcomes
 - A timeline for the student's progression towards independence
 - Regular review processes, including feedback meetings with parents/guardians
- In planning SNA support, careful consideration must be given to a student's dignity, autonomy, and expressed wishes.
- The SNA operates as part of the whole-school team, and their duties must align with relevant Department of Education and Youth circulars. SNAs do not have a teaching role; responsibility for teaching, learning, and the delivery of educational programmes rests with the class teacher and, where appropriate, the special education teacher (SET).
- SNA support is not meant to be a means of addressing social, emotional or behavioural needs of students. These areas fall under the responsibility of the class teacher and SET, within a planned, whole-school approach. However, an SNA may play a supportive role within behavioural or targeted interventions where:
 - All appropriate other supportive practices have been explored.
 - The approach is evidence-based
 - The role of the SNA is clearly defined.
 - The support is documented through SMART targets in the SSP and reviewed regularly by the class teacher and/or SET
- In all cases, the SNA must be responsive to identified and emerging needs within the school. Duties assigned to SNAs should remain flexible and are not tied to any individual student. SNAs are part of a collaborative school team that works to meet students' core care needs as outlined in the SSP.
- To support effective practice, SNAs should be included in Student Support Plan meetings. This helps them understand each student's needs, the supports in place and their independence goals. It is also vital that to include the views of parents and/or guardians and that of the student.
- The main role of an SNA is to help students access the school environment and become more independent in line with SSP targets. Any extra tasks should only be taken on after the student's core care needs are fully met. SNAs are employed and allocated primarily to meet these core care needs.
- The NCSE Teacher Professional Learning programme includes a seminar on effective SNA deployment

Link: [TPL Booklet](#)

3.10 School Practice

- Effective school practice, in line with guidance from the Department of Education and Youth (DEY) and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), is based on a coordinated, whole-school approach in which responsibility for supporting students with special educational needs is shared across all members of the school community. School leadership plays a central role in establishing inclusive policies, embedding the Continuum of Support, and ensuring that robust systems are in place to identify, support and monitor students' needs effectively. Leaders are also responsible for fostering a culture of collaboration, professional learning and shared accountability among class teachers, special education teachers (SETs), special needs assistants (SNAs), Irish Sign Language Specialist Classroom Support, parents and external professionals. This ensures that provision is consistent, structured and responsive to student need.
- A key feature of effective practice is the use of Student Support Plans (SSPs). SSPs are developed collaboratively and include SMART targets (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound) tailored to the student's current level of need. These plans provide clarity regarding the interventions to be implemented, the personnel involved, and the strategies required to support student progress. SSPs are subject to regular review and adjustment to reflect evolving needs. Parental involvement, and, where appropriate, the student voice, are integral to this process, ensuring that planning is meaningful and grounded in the learner's lived experience.
- Inclusive practice underpins all aspects of school life. Effective schools prioritise belonging and participation for all students by embedding inclusive teaching methodologies, such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), within everyday classroom practice. Inclusion is not solely dependent on additional supports; rather, it is reflected in how learning environments, curriculum access and relationships are structured to support all learners. Engagement with NCSE-led professional learning supports teacher agency and the ongoing development of inclusive learning environments.
- Learning and teaching are most effective when they are collaborative and responsive. Class teachers retain primary responsibility for the progress of all students, working in partnership with SETs to design and deliver targeted interventions. SNAs support students under the direction of teaching staff, with a clear emphasis on promoting independence. The contribution of the SNA should be reflected in the Student Support Plan and reviewed in line with school policy. This coordinated approach ensures that supports are purposeful, cohesive and aligned with identified needs.
- The school environment is a critical component of effective provision. High-quality practice involves the creation of structured, predictable and supportive classroom environments that reduce barriers to learning and promote emotional regulation. Consideration is given to sensory needs, the use of visual supports, consistent routines and clear expectations across the school. Behaviour is understood as a form of communication, and proactive, preventative strategies are prioritised to address underlying needs and minimise factors that may contribute to dysregulation.
- Transitions between classes, settings and stages of education are carefully planned and supported to ensure continuity and to reduce anxiety for students. This includes effective communication between staff, preparation of students and families, and the use of SSP information to inform transition planning. Overall, effective school practice is characterised by a coherent and inclusive system in which leadership, planning, teaching, environment and support services work together to achieve positive outcomes for all students.



3.11 Timetabling of SNA Reviews and Support

All schools involved in the NCSE-led reviews will be notified by 2nd October.

- The month in which the review is planned will be shared with each school in advance. The specific date will be confirmed closer to the time.
- A 2 hour online SNA Review training will take place throughout October, outlining the process and required documents.
- It has been recognised that teaching principals have different administrative days, so several session options are available:

Mainstream school webinars for school year 2026/27

- Tuesday 6th October and Thursday 8th October: 10:00 am – 12:00 pm
- Monday 12th, Wednesday 14th, and Friday 16th October: 12:00pm – 2:00pm
- Tuesday 20th October and Thursday 22nd October: 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm

Special school webinars:

- Wednesday 7th October at 10:00 am - 12 pm
- Tuesday 15th October at 12:00 pm - 2 pm
- Wednesday 21st October at 1:00pm- 3pm

Key Application Dates for schools to apply for SNA review

- **Application Window 1:** 15 September – 24 October at 5 pm
- **Application Window 2:** 8 December – 12 December at 5 pm

3.12 SNA Reviews in advance of September 2026

(a) It is acknowledged that some schools may have needs that exceed their current allocation of resources upon reopening in September. In such instances, schools should contact their local National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) to request a preliminary review. The SENO will arrange a meeting (either online or in person) to discuss the school's circumstances.

(b) It is recognised that schools may experience an increase in care needs from September 2026. Such emerging needs will ordinarily be addressed through the standard review process at that time. This application process is intended to apply only in exceptional circumstances, specifically where schools have little or no SNA allocation and where existing deployment cannot reasonably meet the care needs of students.

(c) Following consideration of the school's care needs register, the SENO will determine, in consultation with the school, whether the review process should proceed.

(d) Where a school has undergone a full school SNA review during the 2025/2026 academic year, a desk-based review may be undertaken.

(ii) Special schools:

The SNA review process is structured across three distinct categories of special schools:

Expanding Special schools:

- Special schools that are expanding shall submit a special school Record Form in respect of newly enrolled students. This form must include detailed information on each student's assessed care needs, together with a completed section outlining both the school and the new classroom environment.
- For a desk review to be undertaken, all notifications of enrolment must be submitted to the local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO). This process may commence once all notifications of enrolment have been shared with the local SENO.
- All submissions shall be reviewed by the SNA Review Panel and schools will be notified of the outcome within three weeks of the date of submission. Schools are required to liaise directly with their local SENO in relation to this process.
 - Where a school has undergone a full school SNA review in the current academic year (2025-2026), a desk review may be conducted.
 - Where a school has not undergone a review, a desk review will take place during the current term, followed by an NCSE-led full school review in the 2026/2027 academic year.

Existing special schools (Not New or Expanding):

- Special schools that are not classified as new or expanding shall be subject to the standard SNA review process. This will be a full review. The school can contact their local SENO to complete a full review.

New special schools:

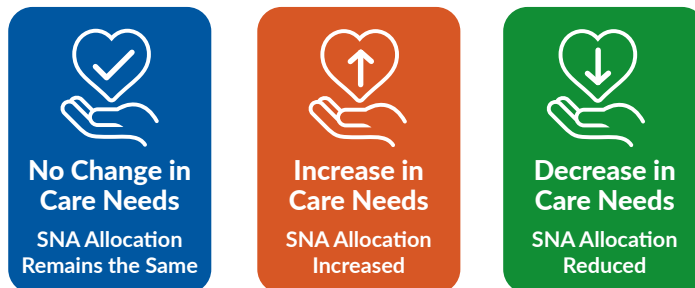
- New special schools shall be assigned a level of SNA staffing on establishment. An SNA review will be conducted once the school has opened, taking into account the school's operational needs, including any anticipated future expansion. SNAs above the baseline allocation are subject to review the following academic year and this will inform allocations for the 27/28 academic year.

3.13 The Allocation Process

The SNA Review Panel reviews all SNA reviews.

(i). Outcome of a Review

SNA Review Outcomes



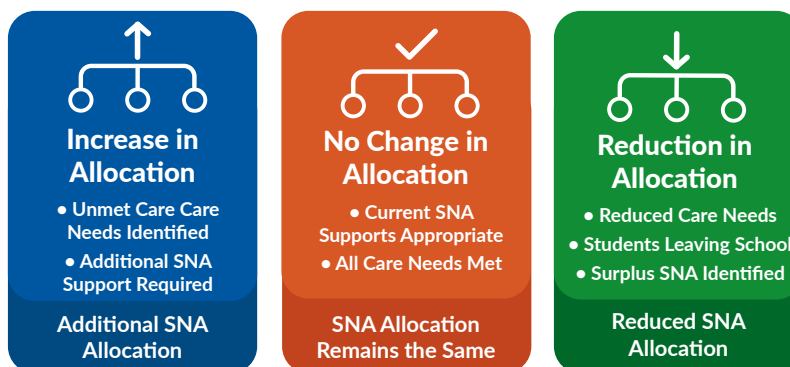
SNA Support Adjusted Based on Assessed Level of Need

(ii). Determination of Allocation

- All changes to a school's allocation are based on a change in students identified with Level 2 or Level 3 core care needs.

SNA Allocation Determination & Rationale

Review of Students with Level 2 & Level 3 Care Needs



Decisions Based on Evidence & Assessed Level of Need

Reduction in Allocation (Surplus SNA Allocation)

The number of SNA posts or hours may be reduced for different reasons including but not limited to:

- Students with highly significant care needs leaving the school
- Students developing increased independence
- Students experiencing a reduction in care needs
- Establishment of a new special class, with high-need students moving into a setting allocated specific SNA supports
- Inappropriate deployment of SNA resources to teaching duties
- Where support needs identified are more appropriately addressed through alternative supports such as SET rather than SNA provision
- The NCSE shall provide a written rationale for the determination, and engagement with the relevant SENO may be facilitated where appropriate.
- Any reduction shall not exceed one SNA posts within a single review cycle
- Where a reduction of more than one whole-time equivalent (WTE) post has been identified. The NCSE will note the overall surplus and the school will have an NCSE review occur the following year.
- A school's allocation shall not be reduced below one SNA post
- For a school with no SNA based on an SNA Review and identification of core care needs present an allocation of an infant post (0.83) or 1 full time post will be allocated

3.14 SNA Post levels

SNA allocations will be determined in accordance with the following whole time equivalent post levels:

- 0.5 (half a full school day post)
- 0.83 (infant day post)
- 1.0 (full school day post)
 - In a small number of circumstances, the NCSE may round allocations to the nearest applicable post level.

4.0 Student Regulation and Wellbeing

- Schools are required to develop and implement well-coordinated, effective whole-school approaches to supporting students. Under section 23 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, the board of management of each school must prepare and make available a code of behaviour for its students to create and maintain a safe, positive learning environment for the whole school community.
- Teachers have responsibility for the overall progress of their students, including those who become dysregulated and display behaviours of concern.
- What are referred to as behaviours of concern might be examples of how a person is attempting to regulate themselves or they could be a sign of dysregulation. Dysregulation occurs when a student's stress level becomes too much for them to manage. Some of these stressors affecting students may be internal, for instance a physical feeling (for example hunger) or an emotional feeling (for example frustrated) or there could be external stressors happening around a person or to a person (for example a noisy room).

- Under the direction of the teacher/principal the SNAs shall support students to achieve and maintain regulation in line with the student's SSP, school policy and procedures and relevant DEY and NCSE guidance for schools.
- SNA support can include the implementation of regulation breaks, by modelling activities under the direction of the teacher, for students who may require this level of support.
- While SNAs have a role in supporting aspects of student behaviour, it should not be assumed that all students who display behaviours of concern require access to SNA support or that SNA support is the appropriate intervention.
- SNA support should not be considered as a first response when developing strategies for management of behaviour for these students, but only as part of a whole-school response to meeting the student's needs.
- The interventions developed to meet identified needs relating to behaviours of concern, should be set out in the student's SSP and regularly reviewed and amended as necessary over time.
- Plans and strategies should be shared with the SNA as early as possible along with any other relevant information about the student, as outlined in the SSP. For example, SNAs should be made aware of circumstances which might cause additional difficulty for the student which could develop into behaviours of concern. SNAs should be supported and guided on what action to take as explained in the SSP.



5.0 The Redeployment Scheme will operate as outlined in [Circular 0022/2026 and accompanying guidance document](#), where the NCSE SNA review identifies a reduction in care needs in a school this may result in a surplus of SNA(S) posts

- If an SNA position is no longer needed after an NCSE review, the SNA can choose to move to another school where there is a vacancy through the NSA redeployment scheme.
- The scheme is designed to support a flexible SNA workforce that is adaptable and responsive, facilitating redeployment of SNAs to meet evolving student needs and school requirements.

6.0 Appeals of SNA Allocations

6.1 Overview

Schools that are not satisfied with the outcome of an SNA allocation review can submit an appeal through the NCSE system.

- Appeals are handled by an independent NCSE Appeals Panel called NAPSA (NCSE Appeals Panel for SNA Allocations).
- The panel is made up of NCSE officials who were not involved in the original allocation review.
- Appeals must be submitted via the NCSE portal within 10 working days of receiving the review outcome.
- A school can only appeal if a formal NCSE review has already taken place.
- If new information arises, the correct step is not an appeal. Instead, the school should contact the SENO for a focused or desk review.

6.2 Appeal Outcome

- The NAPSA panel reviews the appeal and communicates the outcome by email or letter.
- Outcomes are typically issued by the end of each month.
- The appeal process is aligned with timelines for SNA re-deployment.
- Further details are available on the NCSE website.

6.3 Independent Examination of the Appeal Process

- If a school believes the review process was not properly followed, it can escalate the issue to the Appeals Advisory Committee (AAC).
- The AAC is fully independent of the NCSE and includes:
 - An independent chairperson
 - A school management representative
 - A parent representative
- The AAC decision is final.



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