

# Children with Special Educational Needs

**Information Booklet for Parents**

**ncse**  
An Chomhairle Náisiúnta um Oideachas Speisialta  
National Council for Special Education

  
A.S. BOLESA | DEPARTMENT OF  
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION  
AGUS SCILEANA | AND SKILLS







An Chomhairle Náisiúnta um Oideachas Speisialta  
National Council for Special Education

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## Foreword

One of the many functions of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is to provide information to parents/guardians of children with special educational needs.

This is the second edition of an information booklet for parents/guardians and is intended to help parents/guardians understand more about their child's special educational needs, how these needs are assessed and the supports that are available to their child in school. The NCSE intends to build on this booklet by publishing information pamphlets in relation to specific special educational needs in the future.

The NCSE places great importance on the delivery of a local service to schools and parents/guardians through our network of Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) throughout the country. It is intended that this information booklet will complement the work of SENOs and schools in helping parents to make informed decisions concerning the education of their child with special educational needs.

I hope that this booklet is a helpful source of information for you.

Teresa Griffin

CEO

April 2014

## Abbreviations

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder
AON	Assessment of need
ASD	Autistic Spectrum Disorder
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DSM-IV	Diagnostic Statistical Manual, Volume 4
DSM-V	Diagnostic Statistical Manual, Volume 5
EBD	Emotional and Behavioural Disorders
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
EPSEN	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
GAM	General Allocation Model
GLD	General Learning Disability
HSE	Health Service Executive
ICD -10	International Classification of Diseases 10th Revision
IEP	Individual Education Plan
JCSP	Junior Certificate School Programme
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied
LCVP	Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
NBSS	National Behaviour Support Service
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NEWB	National Educational Welfare Board
PHN	Public Health Nurse
RACE	Reasonable Accommodations in Certificate Examinations
SEC	State Examination Commission
SENO	Special Educational Needs Organiser
SERC	Special Education Review Committee
SESS	Special Education Support Service
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
SSLD	Specific Speech and Language Disorder
TES	Teacher Education Section of the DES



# Introduction

All children, including children with special educational needs, have a right to an education which is appropriate to their needs. The aims of education for pupils with special educational needs are the same as apply to all children. Education should be about enabling all children, in line with their abilities, to live full and independent lives so that they can contribute to their communities, cooperate with other people and continue to learn throughout their lives. Education is about supporting children to develop in all aspects of their lives – spiritual, moral, cognitive, emotional, imaginative, aesthetic, social and physical.

This booklet is written for parents to answer key questions they may have about special education, both generally and as it relates to their child. The word 'parent' in this document should also be taken to include guardians of children.



Topics covered in the booklet include:

- What is a special educational need?
- What is inclusive education?
- What supports are available for your child?
- How are the supports provided?
- What is a learning disability?
- How are your child's special educational needs assessed?
- What will your child learn in school?
- How should transition from primary to post-primary school be planned?
- How can parents support their children?
- What organisations are there to support your child?
- Where can you get more information?

We hope that this booklet will help parents to feel more informed and more confident when making decisions that affect their children's education in school.

# What is a Special Educational Need?

## **Understanding special educational needs**

Children with special educational needs are children first and have much in common with other children of the same age. There are many aspects to a child's development that make up the whole child, including – personality, the ability to communicate (verbal and non-verbal), resilience and strength, the ability to appreciate and enjoy life and the desire to learn. Each child has individual strengths, personality and experiences so particular disabilities will impact differently on individual children. A child's special educational need should not define the whole child.



The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act was passed into law in July 2004. Special educational needs are defined in this act as:

**... a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition.**

The EPSEN Act recognises that special educational needs may arise from four different areas of disability:

- physical
- sensory
- mental health
- learning disability

or from any other condition that results in the child learning differently from a child without that condition. It is also important to understand that a child can have a disability but not have any special educational needs arising from that disability which require additional supports in school.

# Where is Education Provided?

## **The EPSEN Act 2004**

The key message in the EPSEN Act is that children with special educational needs should be educated, wherever possible, in an inclusive environment with children who do not have special educational needs. The EPSEN Act goes on to clarify that there are two exceptions to this commitment to educate all children together in an inclusive environment.

The first exception is where an assessment, carried out under the EPSEN Act, finds that this would not be in the best interests of the child with special needs.

The second is where this would not be in the best interests of the other children with whom the child is to be educated.



The EPSEN Act was brought into law to:

- provide that the education of children with special educational needs shall, wherever possible, take place in an inclusive environment with those who do not have such needs
- provide that children with special educational needs shall have the same right to avail of, and benefit from, appropriate education as do their peers who do not have such needs
- assist children with special educational needs to leave school with the skills necessary to participate, to the level of their capacity, in an inclusive way in the social and economic activities of society and to live independent and fulfilled lives
- provide for the greater involvement of parents of children with special educational needs in the education of their children.

It is important to remember that inclusive education is not just about the particular school or class a child attends. It is also about what goes on in that school or class. Inclusive education means encouraging each child to take part in the everyday activity of the school, and helping every child to achieve the most from school. Inclusive education means ensuring that the system adjusts to meet children's needs, rather than expecting children to 'fit' into the system.

The EPSEN Act has not been fully implemented due to economic circumstances – this decision is under ongoing review. The sections of the Act which have come into force deal mainly with the right to be educated in an inclusive manner, the duties of schools and the establishment of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). The sections of the Act which have not yet been implemented include those which give statutory rights to children with special educational needs in relation to assessment, individual education plans and the right to make appeals.

There are a number of other pieces of legislation which are relevant to children with special educational needs and their parents. The key features of this broad legal framework are outlined in Appendix 2. The full text of all of these Acts can be viewed at: <http://www.oireachtas.ie/>.



# Types of Education Provision

The DES provides for three main types of education provision which are available to primary and post-primary pupils with special educational needs. These are:

- **A mainstream class** in a mainstream primary or post-primary school where the class or subject teacher has primary responsibility for the progress of all pupils in the class, including pupils with special educational needs. Additional teaching support from a learning support or resource teacher may be provided, where appropriate.
- **A special class** in a mainstream primary or post-primary school with a lower pupil-teacher ratio specified according to category of disability. This means that classes have small numbers of pupils, for example, a special class for children with autistic spectrum disorder has one teacher for every six pupils.



- **A special school** with a lower pupil-teacher ratio specified according to category of disability. This means that classes have small numbers of pupils, for example a special school for children with moderate general learning disability has one teacher for every eight pupils.

A range of additional supports may be made available to schools for pupils with special educational needs in each of the above settings. These additional supports are outlined below in the section: [What Supports are Available for your Child?](#)

## Choosing a school for your child

Article 42 of the Irish Constitution recognises that the family is the “primary and natural educator of the child” but the State is obliged to ensure that each child receives a “certain minimum education”. Under the Constitution, the State must provide for free primary education for children. [Special Educational Needs Organisers](#) (SENOs) will inform you about where there are places available for your child in local schools – but ultimately it is up to you to decide where you wish to send your child to school.

The Board of Management of every school must publish an enrolment policy which sets out the policy of the school concerning the admission and participation of children with special educational needs. The school’s enrolment policy must respect the “principles of





equality and the right of parents to send their children to a school of the parents' choice", as stated in the Education Act, 1998.

Parents are often very concerned about whether it is best for their child with special educational needs to attend a mainstream school or a special school or class. In making this decision, it is helpful to think about which setting is most suited to your child's individual needs and the quality of education that can be provided for your child within that setting.

A range of factors should be taken into account such as:

- your child's needs
- your child's best interests
- your own preference
- the needs of other children in the school setting.

If you have a psychological or other professional report on your child, it may be of assistance to you as you make this decision. It is always useful to visit the schools that have places available for your child.

When choosing a school for your child with special educational needs, you may find the following points helpful:

1. Gather information on all the educational options that may be available to your child.
2. Use your own knowledge of your child's learning and social needs.
3. Seek professional advice from those who have assessed your child, for example, psychologists, teachers, speech and language therapists.
4. Speak to other parents who have children in schools that have places available.
5. If your child is moving on to a post-primary school, ask for the views of teachers who have taught your child in primary school.
6. Talk to your local SENO. Contact details are available on the NCSE website (<http://www.ncse.ie/>) or from the school.
7. Make appointments to visit schools that have places available, speak to the principal and teachers in these schools, and attend open evenings when available.

When applying to enrol your child, it is important that you give schools relevant information about your child's special educational needs. This enables the school to prepare, in advance, for your child's arrival in the school.

As your child grows and develops, and their needs change, you can review this decision. A child can move from special into mainstream education and back during their school career.

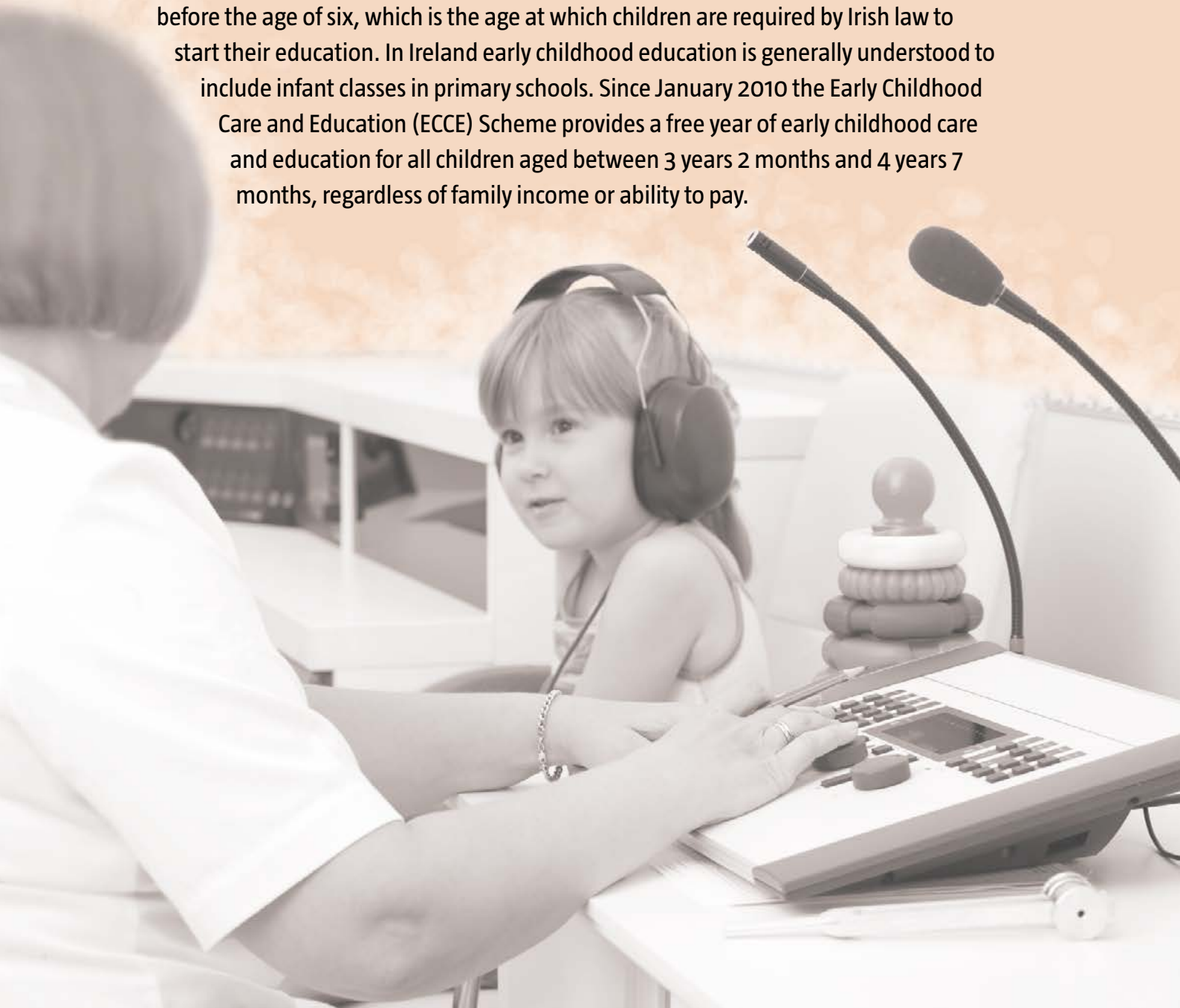
You are of course free to choose to educate your child outside the state-funded educational system. If you choose to educate your child in a place other than a recognised school, for example, home schooling, you must apply to the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) to have the child placed on the Board's register. The State requires that your child is assessed by an authorised person to ensure that your child is receiving a certain minimum education. An authorised person could be a school inspector, an educational welfare officer or a person appointed by NEWB under the terms of the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000.

**When making a decision about where your child is to be educated you can contact the Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) to discuss the different options. The role of the SENO is explained on [page 48](#). Your school will provide you with the contact details for your local SENO which are also available on the NCSE website at [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).**

# What Supports are Available for your Child?

## **Early childhood education**

Early childhood education refers to education before the start of formal schooling or before the age of six, which is the age at which children are required by Irish law to start their education. In Ireland early childhood education is generally understood to include infant classes in primary schools. Since January 2010 the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme provides a free year of early childhood care and education for all children aged between 3 years 2 months and 4 years 7 months, regardless of family income or ability to pay.



Children with special educational needs are eligible to avail of this scheme over two years, with the number of hours and funding per child equating to a single year. Further details of this scheme are available on the website: <http://www.citizensinformationboard.ie>.

The State supports early intervention for children with special educational needs through providing funding to a number of crèche/pre-school settings including:

- early intervention settings attached to mainstream and special schools
- early intervention settings attached to HSE funded service providers
- private pre-school settings supported by the ECCE scheme
- private pre-school settings supported by HSE grant aid
- home tuition.

Your child can access one or more of the above mentioned early intervention settings where you meet the eligibility criteria for support and if the service is available in your area. Eligibility criteria are available on the website of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) at: <http://www.education.ie>.

Children who are deaf/hard of hearing or have a serious visual impairment are generally referred to specialist visual impairment and audiology services at an early age. From there they are referred to the Visiting Teacher Service of the Department of Education and Skills.

The service provided by the Visiting Teachers includes:

- guidance, support and specialist teaching to pre-school children and their parents in the home
- specialist teaching, support and monitoring in schools
- guidance to parents and teachers on developing communication skills
- advice regarding the development of Braille skills
- advice to parents and teachers on the use of assistive technology, including sound-field systems, FM systems, adaptive technology, low vision aids
- liaising with parents, teachers and professionals including audiologists, speech and language therapists, SENOs, cochlear implant team.

Contact details for the Visiting Teacher Service are available on the DES website at <http://www.education.ie/home>.

## School aged children

Children assessed as having special educational needs come to school with a wide range of different needs. A particular disability may not affect learning in a way that means a child needs extra educational support, or indeed it may not affect the capacity for learning at all. Learning together with other children in a mainstream classroom without specialist support may be all that a child needs.

Many children with special educational needs can therefore be fully included in mainstream classes without any additional teaching or care supports. Others may need additional teaching and/or care assistance or assistive technology to support them in mainstream classes. Some children, with greater needs, may benefit from being placed in a special class in mainstream schools where there are smaller numbers of pupils in the class. Other children, with complex needs, may need supportive interventions provided in special schools.

During their school life, children may move from one setting to another as they get older or as differing needs, strengths or abilities emerge. It is important that educational placements are kept under review by the school, parents and other professionals involved. Children with special educational needs should be facilitated to move from one placement to another, where this is appropriate to meet their changing needs and abilities.

Most children with special educational needs are placed in one of the following settings:

1. ordinary classes in mainstream primary or post-primary schools
2. special classes in mainstream primary or post-primary schools
3. special schools.

In all of the above settings, children with special educational needs can be provided with an appropriate and differentiated school curriculum, where necessary, and fully qualified professional teachers. The term 'differentiated curriculum' means that teachers adjust their teaching to take account of children's different needs and abilities (see further definition on page 35). A certain number of these children, who have more complex needs, will have access to individualised education programmes. Children with additional care needs may have access to a special needs assistant (SNA), where this is necessary and appropriate.

## Mainstream classes in mainstream schools: additional teaching support

In both primary and post-primary mainstream schools, class or subject teachers have the primary responsibility for the educational progress of all pupils in their classes. This includes pupils with special educational needs. The DES provides additional learning support and resource teaching support to build on, and complement, the education delivered by the class teacher.

Every school is provided with an additional allocation of learning support hours. The fact that your child has special educational needs does not automatically mean that a school needs additional resources in order to provide an inclusive and appropriate education to your child.

## Primary schools

At primary level additional teaching resources are allocated to the school in two main ways:

- under the General Allocation Model which was introduced in 2005<sup>1</sup>, or
- through application to the NCSE which has a countrywide network of SENOs who allocate additional resources to schools in respect of particular children.

Under the General Allocation Model, additional learning support and resource teaching is allocated to primary schools on the basis of the number of class teachers in the school. Schools have differing pupil teacher ratios depending on whether the school is a boys', mixed or girls' school and whether or not the school has disadvantaged status.

Schools can use additional resources provided under the General Allocation Model to support:

- Pupils who are eligible for learning support teaching in mainstream primary and post-primary schools. These are pupils who score below the 10th percentile (less than 90% of pupils of the same age-group) on standardised tests of reading or mathematics.
- Pupils with learning difficulties which include:
  - children with mild speech and language difficulties
  - pupils with mild social or emotional difficulties
  - pupils with mild co-ordination or attention control difficulties associated with for example, dyspraxia, ADHD.
- Pupils who have special educational needs arising from high incidence disabilities. High incidence special educational needs are those which occur more frequently in the general population. These are:
  - borderline mild general learning disability
  - mild general learning disability
  - specific learning disability.

<sup>1</sup> For further information on the General Allocation Model and the system for allocation of individualised resources, see Special Education Circular 02/2005, accessible on [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie).

Pupils do not need to have psychological assessments or a formal diagnosis of disability to avail of learning support/resource teaching resources already in the school under the General Allocation Model.

The NCSE, through its SENO network, allocates additional teaching resources to primary schools for children with low incidence special educational needs. Applications for additional teaching hours to support pupils with low incidence disabilities must be accompanied by relevant professional reports showing assessment and diagnostic information. Varying levels of resource teaching hours are allocated to schools depending on the category of special educational needs, according to DES Circulars. Low incidence special educational needs are those which occur less frequently in the general population. These are:

- moderate, severe or profound general learning disability
- significant physical or sensory impairment
- emotional disturbance and/or behaviour problems
- autistic spectrum disorder.

### **Post-primary schools**

Learning support teachers are allocated to post-primary schools based on the number of students enrolled. Post-primary schools receive further additional teaching support for pupils with high incidence special educational needs. The NCSE, through its SENO network, allocates additional teaching resources to post-primary schools on behalf of individual pupils who have been assessed and diagnosed as having low incidence special educational needs. The allocations made by the SENOs are based on the number of students assessed as having low incidence special educational needs. Applications for additional teaching hours to support pupils with low incidence disabilities must be accompanied by relevant professional reports showing assessment and diagnostic information.

Varying levels of resource teaching hours are allocated to schools depending on the different categories of special educational needs, according to DES Circulars.

### **Mainstream classes in mainstream schools: special needs assistant support**

In mainstream primary and post-primary schools, children with special care needs arising from a disability may be given access to special needs assistant (SNA) support through the NCSE. SNAs are appointed to schools to assist with the care needs of pupils with disabilities. This can include helping with activities like clothing, feeding, and



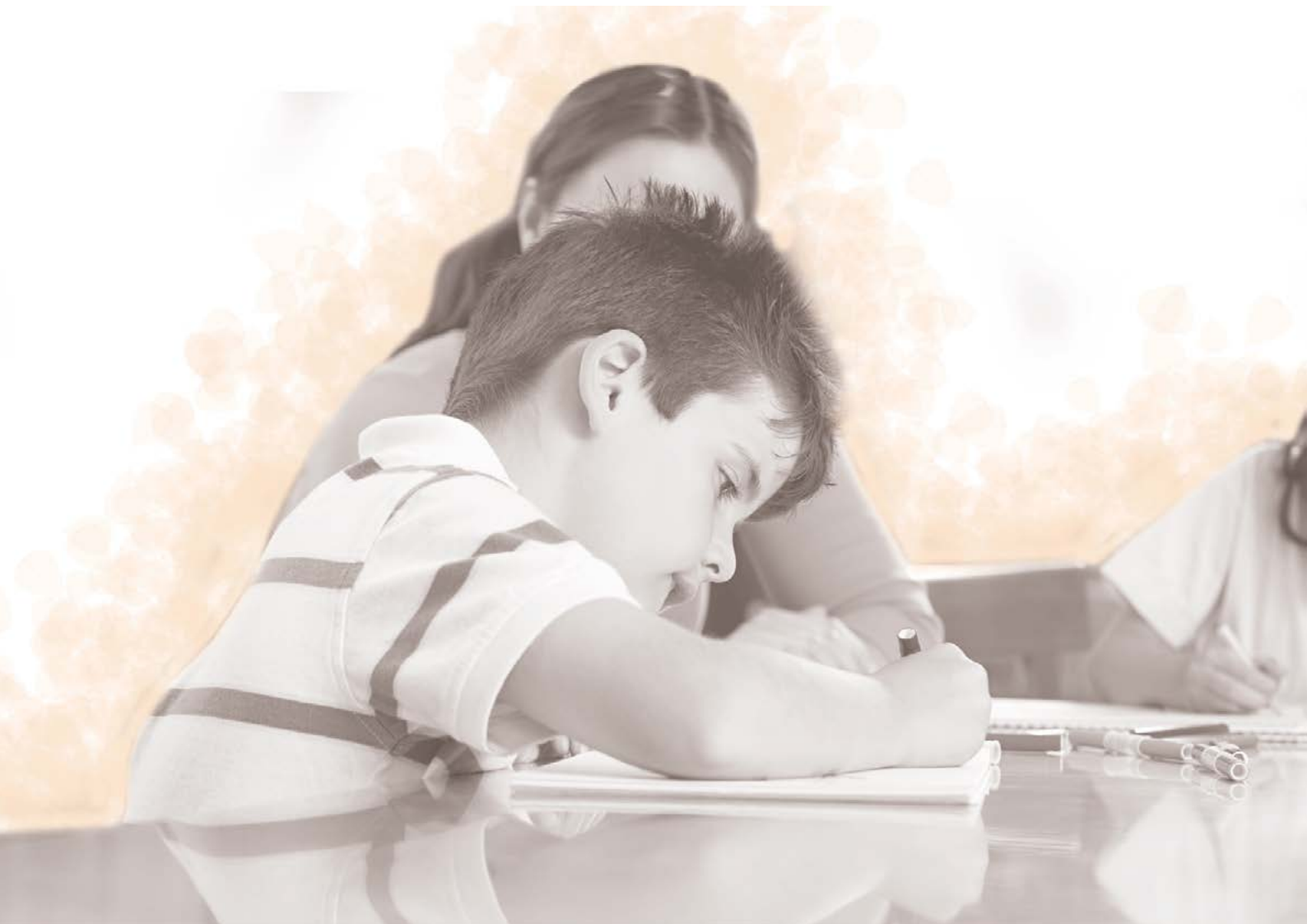
mobility. It is not the role of the SNA to teach pupils or provide educational support, as SNAs are not qualified teachers. All pupils, particularly those with special educational needs, must be taught directly by a class teacher.

SNAs provide care support to children who are assessed as needing such assistance to attend school. They are not appointed as a personal assistant to the individual child. SNAs are a school based resource and usually support a number of other children with care needs in the school.

SNAs help children to develop independent living skills so that they are able to interact, as much as possible, with their classmates and peers. It is important that pupils do not become over dependent on adult SNA support. As children grow and develop and become more independent, they may need less SNA support as they progress through school.

Schools will apply for SNA support, if required, where pupils have:

- a significant medical need for care assistance
- a significant impairment of physical or sensory function, or
- where their behaviour is such that they are a danger to themselves or other pupils.





In the case of SNA applications, the school has to send relevant professional reports showing the nature and extent of the child's care needs. When making an application for SNA support, schools are asked to consider the importance of balancing the need of the child for necessary care support and the right of the child to acquire personal independence skills (DES Circular Sp. Ed. 07/02).

A school's application for the services of an SNA must be based on:

- a report from the professional who diagnosed the child's special care needs
- evidence that describes the child's special care need, the reasons why the support of an SNA is necessary and the benefits that the child would gain from such care support in a school setting.

SENOs allocate SNA support to the school on a full time or part time basis in the context of the school's overall needs and in accordance with current DES policy. The duties of the SNA are of a non-teaching nature. The school must arrange to use its SNA staff to meet the care needs of all the pupils who have been identified as needing assistance.

### **Transfer of supports from primary to post-primary school**

The additional supports that your child receives in primary school do not automatically transfer to post-primary (secondary) school. This is because children's needs change over time and they may require a greater or lesser amount of support to manage in a post-primary school. It is also because the primary school is the employer of the SNA and/or resource teacher and such employees do not automatically transfer from one employer to another.

When your child is transferring from primary to post-primary, the post-primary school must apply for resources to the NCSE. In order to do this, the post-primary school will need up to date professional reports about your child.

If your child received additional teaching support at primary school for low incidence special needs you will already have the relevant reports - though you may need to have them updated. Your SENO can advise you about this.

The assessment must be sent into the post-primary school in sufficient time to enable the school to apply for additional teaching supports.

In the case of SNA support for a child's care needs, you may have the relevant reports already from primary school, but you may need to have them updated as your child's care needs may have changed. As children's care needs diminish and they become more independent, a key goal in providing SNA support in the first place has been achieved. It is then possible to reduce the level of SNA support required by the child as s/he enters post-primary school.

## How is support provided in mainstream schools and classes?

All additional teaching support given to your child should build on and complement the support delivered by the class/subject teacher in the ordinary classroom situation. (DES Circular 02/05). Effective additional teaching support can be provided to your child in a number of different ways including:

1. your child is taught by the class teacher, as part of a small group, within the ordinary classroom
2. your child is withdrawn for one to one teaching
3. your child is part of a class where team teaching is taking place.

[Team teaching is where the resource teacher or learning support teacher go into a class with the class teacher and share the planning and delivery of the class.]

Research shows that there is no one of the above models that suits all children with special educational needs for all of their school life. Most schools are flexible and may use all of the models described above, in different combinations. The school will take the particular needs of individual children into account when planning how best to provide support to them.

## Resource and learning support teachers

Resource and learning support teachers work to improve educational outcomes for children with special educational needs in a number of different ways including:

- assessing and recording the child's needs and progress
- setting specific, time-related targets for each child and agreeing these with the class teacher and principal
- teaching the children, either in a separate room or with the rest of the child's class
- advising class teachers about differentiating the curriculum to suit different children
- meeting with and advising parents, accompanied by the class teacher, as needed
- meeting other professionals such as psychologists, speech and language therapists, visiting teachers in relation to a child's special educational needs.

## Department of Education and Skills: categories of special educational needs for the purpose of allocating resources

Children with special educational needs are all different and have individual requirements. Particular definitions of special educational needs have been developed in policy and legislation in recent decades. The definitions used by the Department of

Education and Skills for the allocation of additional resources to pupils with special educational needs are outlined in [Appendix 1](#) of this booklet. Some of the key DES circulars are included in the [Bibliography](#) at the end of this booklet.

## **Special classes in mainstream schools /special schools: additional teaching and SNA supports**

It may be in the best interest of a child with complex or severe needs to receive his/her education in a special class in a mainstream school, or in a special school. These schools and classes have smaller class sizes – some as low as six pupils – to assist the school in meeting the educational needs of the children who attend. Increased funding is also paid to special schools and to mainstream schools with special classes.

Children in special schools and classes have much smaller numbers of pupils in their classes than children in mainstream classes. In addition, special schools and classes may be given a baseline level of SNA support, that is an allocation of SNAs per class, to reflect the profile of care needs expected in the class. For example, a class with six children with severe/profound general learning disabilities has a teacher and two SNA posts sanctioned.

Additional SNA support over and above the baseline allocation of SNA support may also be sanctioned by the NCSE where individual children have been enrolled with significant care needs over and above that generally expected in that class. This additional allocation is reviewed annually and can be adjusted in line with the changing needs of the pupils concerned.

## **Other supports**

The Department of Education and Skills also funds the following supports to children enrolled in mainstream primary and post-primary schools and in special schools, where needed:

- School transport where the student is going to the nearest recognised mainstream school, special class/ special school, that is or can be resourced, to meet the child's special educational needs. In certain circumstances the Department will sanction grant-aid towards the cost of private transport. Details of the scheme can be found on the website of the DES under the School Transport Section. If you choose to send your child to a school further away than the nearest school that can be resourced to meet your child's needs, school transport is not provided.
- Escorts on school transport for children with special educational needs.

- Grants available to families of deaf/hard of hearing children for sign language tuition.
- Grants for assistive technology such as radio aids, Braille machines and computers.
- Grants for specialised seating and other specialist furniture.
- Start-up grants for the purchase of equipment and materials in special classes.

**Your school and the local SENO are available to assist you in planning for the move from primary to post-primary school. Your school will provide you with the contact details for your local SENO which are also available on the NCSE website at [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).**

# What is a Learning Disability?

A child can have a learning disability that is either *general* or *specific* in nature. A specific learning disability is very different to a general learning disability and these important differences are explained in more detail in the sections below.

## **General learning disability (GLD)**

Children with general learning disabilities find it more difficult to learn, understand and do things than other children of the same age. They can continue to learn and make progress all through their lives but at a slower pace than other children.

A general learning disability can be at the level of mild, moderate, severe or profound. The impact of the disability can be very different for individuals, with each child showing a unique profile of strengths and needs.



A psychologist is the professional who assesses children's learning ability. When psychologists do this, they take into account a number of different factors. These include:

- the age of the child
- how well the child is coping with ordinary everyday tasks at school and at home such as using money, home-work, going to the shop, dressing, feeding and so on
- whether the child is making friends with their peer-group and is able to take part, appropriately, in games and other activities
- how well the child performs on tests of intelligence, reading, numeracy
- the child's ability to use and understand language.

### **Mild general learning disability**

Children with mild general learning disabilities develop at a slower rate than other children. Their speech and language may take longer to develop. They may have difficulty in forming concepts, such as colour, and in putting their thoughts and ideas into words. Some children may show a lack of co-ordination in motor activities, for example, hand-writing, football, skipping or tying shoelaces. It can be more difficult for these children to pay attention in class and to remember what they have learned. They may have greater difficulty transferring what they learn in the classroom to other settings. Children with mild general learning disabilities have difficulties with most areas of the curriculum in school, including reading, writing and comprehension and mathematics.

It can also take longer for them to develop the skills that are necessary for daily living which include the ability to take care of themselves and to relate to others. Some children with mild general learning disability may find it difficult to adapt to school life and may show signs of inappropriate or what might be considered immature behaviour.

### **Moderate general learning disability**

Children with moderate general disabilities show significant delays in reaching developmental milestones, such as walking, talking, reading, writing and so on. They have considerable difficulty with basic literacy and numeracy and their language, communication, personal and social development is affected. Many students with moderate general learning disabilities have great difficulty concentrating on tasks and transferring what they learn from one situation to another. They need simple, direct and clear instruction in order to benefit from the classroom situation.

Some children with moderate general learning disabilities can have additional disabilities or conditions, including autistic spectrum disorders, medical conditions, physical and/or sensory disabilities, and emotional/behavioural difficulties.

## Severe/profound general learning disability

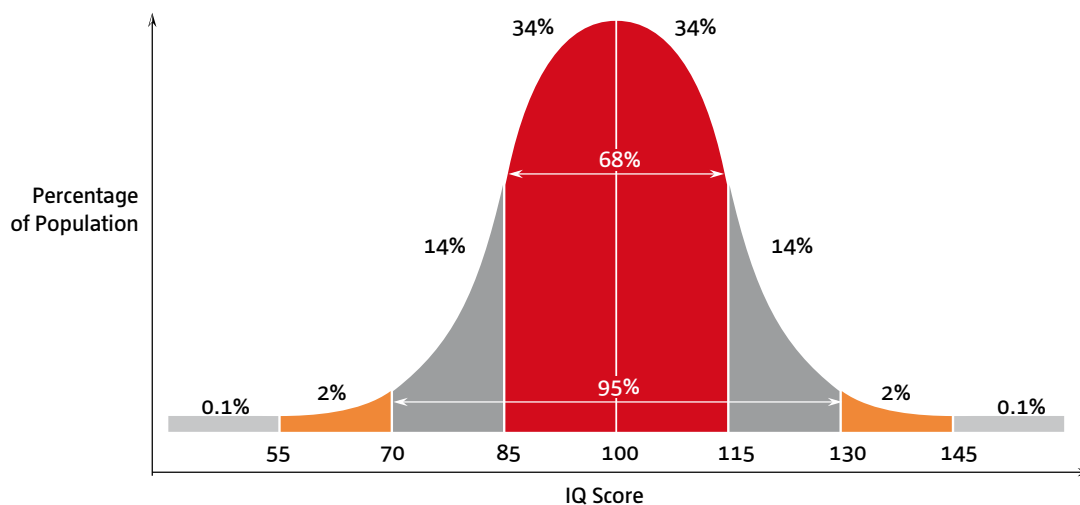
Children with severe/profound general learning disabilities show serious delays in reaching developmental milestones. Their basic awareness and understanding of themselves and the world around them is limited by their level of disability. They usually have considerable difficulties in communicating with other people and the outside world. Many of these children have additional disabilities or conditions, including autistic spectrum disorders, medical conditions, physical and/or sensory disabilities, and emotional/behavioural difficulties.

Children with severe/profound general learning disabilities will depend on others throughout their lives to help them with basic needs such as mobility, communication, feeding and toileting.

## Categories of general learning disability

An IQ score can be used as an indicator of intellectual functioning: the higher the score, the higher the functioning. An average IQ score is taken to be within the range of 90-110, with 100 as the mean or average score. About 68% of people have an IQ score that lies somewhere between 85 and 115, as shown in Fig. 1 below. Only 2% of people would be expected to have an IQ score of less than 70.

Figure 1: IQ Score Distribution



Source: Based on the Stanford-Binet measurement of intelligence as developed by Terman (1916).

For the purpose of granting additional supports to schools, the DES defines the categories of general learning disability as follows:



**Mild GLD:** IQ score of between 50 and 70 on a standardised test of intelligence

**Moderate GLD:** IQ score of between 35 and 49 on a standardised test of intelligence

**Severe/Profound GLD:** IQ score of less than 35 on a standardised test of intelligence.

A formal diagnosis of a general learning disability also requires that a student is experiencing a significant impairment in the area of adaptive functioning or general life skills.

### **Specific learning disability**

A specific learning disability is quite different to a general learning disability. A child with a specific learning disability has difficulty in a specific area of learning such as reading, writing, spelling and arithmetical notation. Their difficulties are very specific and are not due to other causes such as their general ability being below average, defective sight or hearing, emotional factors or a physical condition. The difficulties experienced by a person can range from mild to severe.

Specific learning disabilities include:

**Dyslexia** which is a difficulty in learning to read. This may mean that the child finds it hard to learn to read words or to understand what is written.

**Dyscalculia** which is a difficulty with numbers. This may mean that the child finds it hard to understand how numbers work or learn to count or add, subtract, multiply and divide.

**Dysgraphia** which is a difficulty with writing/spelling. This means that the child finds it difficult to write legibly and may have problems with spelling. They may find it hard to order their thoughts when writing a story or essay.

**A special educational need represents only one aspect of a child's development; it should not define the child. There are many other dimensions to a child's development including personality, the ability to communicate (verbal and non-verbal), resilience and strength, the ability to appreciate and enjoy life, and the desire to learn, whatever their potential ability.**



# How are a Child's Educational Needs Assessed?

## First steps

In most cases the key to providing children with a good start is early assessment and intervention. Parents see their child's development at first hand and are most likely to notice if learning is not progressing well. In some cases though, learning or other disabilities may not become apparent until a child is already in school.

If you feel your child may have special educational needs and requires support you should speak first to your public health nurse (PHN) who will provide advice and guidance to you.



## The early years

Children may be referred to early intervention teams or community based therapy services by GPs or public health nurses or through self-referral by their parent(s). In these cases, the children's needs are assessed as part of this service. In the early years, the main focus of the HSE assessment and intervention is related to health matters.

If your child is under 5 years of age and has a disability, s/he is entitled to an assessment under the Disability Act, 2005. You can apply to the HSE, through your local Assessment Officer for this independent and free assessment of need. A list of local HSE offices is available from the HSE website at: <http://www.hse.ie/eng/>.

Each Local Health Office has an Assessment Officer. They can assist you with your child's application and help and support you through the process. The Assessment Officer is responsible for issuing your child's assessment report. The assessment is independent, based solely on your child's needs, and is carried out regardless of the cost or availability of the services identified in the assessment as being appropriate to meet the needs of the child. If the Assessment Officer finds that your child may need an education service to be provided, s/he asks the National Council for Special Education, in writing, to assist in the carrying out of the assessment.

An assessment of need helps to build up a profile of your child's individual strengths and needs. An assessment report will be issued to you and this will detail your child's health and educational needs and any services which may be required to meet those needs. The assessment report will form the basis of a Service Statement which will outline what services will actually be provided to your child, taking into account the availability of the service. You will receive your child's assessment report and service statement at the same time.

This means that the SENO will be aware of your child's particular needs when s/he starts school. If you are not happy with the assessment or service statement, you can raise this with the HSE, who will arrange for your case to be reviewed.

## Children of school-going age

If your child is already at primary school, and you feel that s/he is having difficulty in the areas of learning or socialisation, the first thing to do is speak to the class teacher and/or school principal. If your child is in a post-primary school you should contact the class tutor, year-head or principal. Good communication with your child's school will help to identify special educational needs as early as possible.

The National Educational Psychological Service (often known as NEPS) is a service that supports schools in meeting the needs of children with special educational needs. NEPS

has developed a system of identifying and supporting children, known as the Continuum of Support. This system involves gathering information, planning ways of helping and reviewing progress. The Continuum of Support works at three different levels – in primary schools the levels are called *Classroom Support*, *School Support* and *School Support Plus*. In post-primary schools the three levels of support are called *Support for All*, *School Support (for some)* and *School Support Plus (for a few)*.

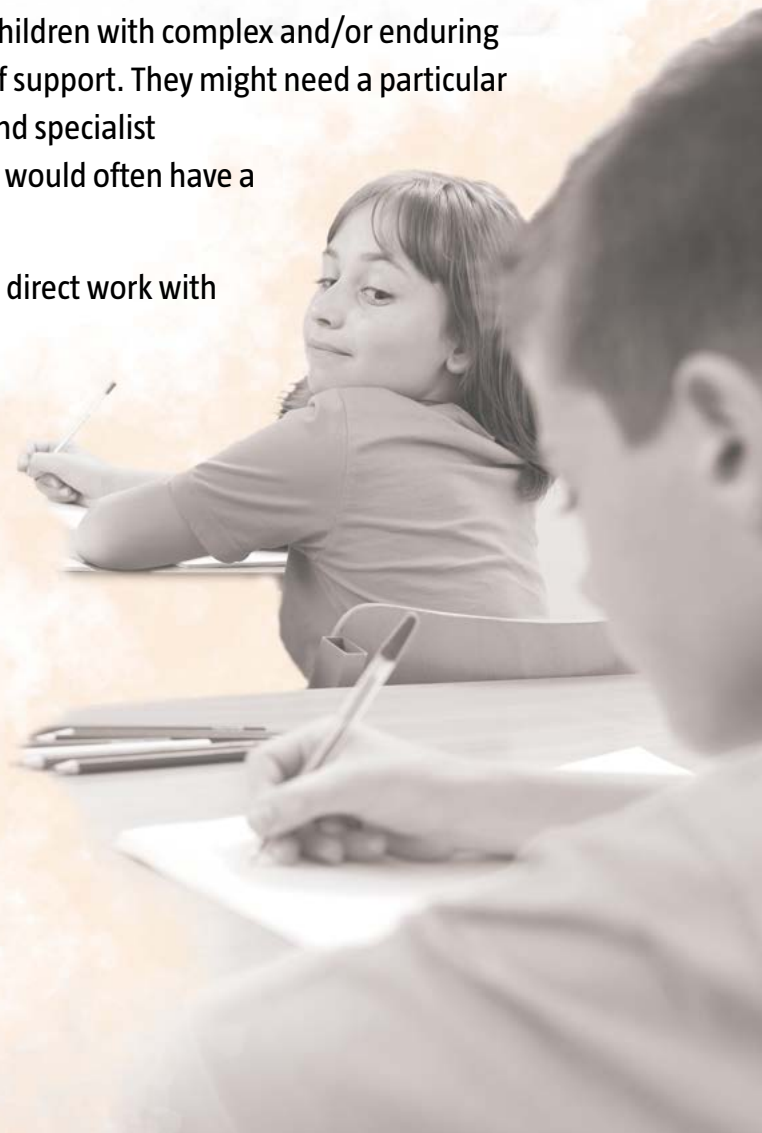
*Classroom Support/Support for All* is really about effective classroom teaching and early identification. Teachers are encouraged to adjust their teaching (called differentiation, see page 35) to take account of children's different needs and abilities. Schools also help children by having systems in place which support the learning and social development of all pupils. This can be done in a variety of ways. It might be a buddy system for new first years in a post-primary school or a Pupil of the Week reward system in a primary classroom.

*School Support (for some)* is needed when what is being done in the ordinary classroom is not enough to meet the needs of the child. Often a learning support or resource teacher is involved and some students, or groups of students get extra help. This help could be in a number of areas, such as help with reading or maths, or help with play skills or language. Children getting this kind of help usually have a Support Plan.

*School Support Plus (for a few)* is generally for children with complex and/or enduring needs. Relatively few students need this level of support. They might need a particular programme of help, with individual supports and specialist interventions. Children getting this kind of help would often have a Support Plan or Individual Education Plan.

NEPS psychologists are most likely to engage in direct work with the pupils, parent and teachers at *School Support Plus* level. Further detail on the *continuum of support* is available on [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie).

If you think your child may need to be seen by a NEPS psychologist, you should begin by discussing your child's needs with the teacher and/or school principal. Not every child needs to meet the psychologist in person. Each school makes referrals to their NEPS psychologist, who helps the school to develop a plan.



At present, the formal educational assessment of school-going children is generally carried out by NEPS, or privately arranged where NEPS psychologists are not available or where parents choose to do so privately. Other assessments, such as Speech and Language or Occupational Therapy are carried out under community services at local health offices. <http://www.hse.ie/eng/>.

**The class teacher plays a key role in assessing, supporting and teaching children with special educational needs. They can be supported in their work by resource and learning support teachers. Other professionals may become involved to provide further in-depth assessment to highlight pupils' learning strengths and needs, where this is required.**



# What will your Child Learn at School?

## Primary schools

Every child is unique, with individual strengths and learning needs. Child-centeredness is at the core of the Primary school curriculum. This recognises that there are different kinds of learning and that children learn in different ways. It means that the curriculum and the methods used to teach the curriculum in primary school are broad and flexible so that the needs, abilities and interests of the individual child can be accommodated.

The primary curriculum is designed in such a way that teachers can 'differentiate' it for different children. Differentiation means that teachers adapt lessons or tasks so that children with special educational needs can participate in and benefit from the curriculum at a level and pace that best suits their own learning style and needs. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has produced guidelines for teachers of pupils with general learning disabilities for use in primary schools.



These guidelines help teachers to include these pupils in their classes. Details of the curriculum for all primary schools are available on the NCCA website ([www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie)).

## Post-primary schools

During junior cycle in post-primary schools, that is from first to third year, the majority of pupils, including those with special educational needs, follow a course of study which leads to the Junior Certificate Examination. Certain schools also offer the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) as another certification option. The JCSP attempts to create conditions through which the young people concerned can have a positive experience of school and achieve success.

The NCCA has produced guidelines for teachers of pupils with general learning disabilities for use in the junior cycle of post-primary and special schools as an aid to teachers to include these pupils in their classes. A new Level 2 qualification is being introduced as part of new Junior Cycle developments. This qualification is designed to meet the needs of students with significant general learning disability. You can find out more about the NCCA at [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie).

Junior cycle is followed by a two or three year senior cycle depending on whether the optional transition year is taken. Transition year is available in many post-primary schools. It immediately follows the junior cycle and provides an opportunity for students, including students with special educational needs, to experience a wide range of educational inputs, including work experience, over the course of a year that is free from formal exams.

During the final two years of senior cycle students can take one of three programmes, each leading to a state examination. These three programmes are:

- the traditional Leaving Certificate (Established)
- the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP)
- the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA).

Each of the three programmes has different aims and a different focus. The ways that pupils are assessed also varies across the three programmes. Your school will be able to advise you about which are the most suitable programmes for your child following the junior cycle.

Details of the curriculum in post-primary schools are available on the [NCCA website](http://www.ncca.ie).

## Reasonable accommodation in certificate examinations

The State Examinations Commission (SEC) operates the Reasonable Accommodation in Certificate Examinations (RACE) scheme. Under this scheme, pupils with permanent or long-term conditions, which will significantly impair their performance in state exams, may apply to the SEC for a reasonable accommodation(s) to be made to facilitate them taking the examinations (<http://www.examinations.ie/>). These accommodations can include:

- exemption from certain parts of the exam
- arrangements to have question papers read to the student
- Braille translation of question papers
- permission to record answers on tape recorder, typewriter or word-processor
- dictation of answers to a person acting as a scribe rather than to a tape recorder
- ten minutes extra time.

## Exemption from the study of Irish

Certain pupils with special educational needs may be exempted from the study of Irish. Details of this scheme are available in the DES Circular 12/96 which is available at [http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/pc12\\_96.doc](http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/pc12_96.doc).

## Other programmes

In addition to the above courses, a number of pupils with special educational needs in some special schools and mainstream post-primary schools now follow courses leading to Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) awards. FETAC has responsibility for setting the standards for named awards at levels 1 to 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications. Since 2006, FETAC has set standards for named awards at levels 1 and 2 and has recently introduced three new certificates at these levels. This may provide an opportunity for students, who have significant learning disabilities and who are unable to access the Junior or Leaving Certificate programmes, to achieve certification.

**ASDAN** is an UK based approved awarding body which creates opportunities for learners to achieve personal and social development through the achievement of a wide range of ASDAN Awards and Qualifications. A number of the awards have been developed for learners with moderate, severe, complex, profound or multiple learning difficulties. These awards are available in a small number of special schools in Ireland.

The principal can advise you if the above options are available in your child's school.

## Individual education plans

An individual education plan (IEP) is a written plan that guides a child's learning and progress. The IEP sets out the learning goals to be achieved by a child over a certain time period and it lists the teaching strategies, resources and supports that are needed to help a child to reach those goals. It should be developed and reviewed by teachers in conjunction with parents, pupils and where necessary, with others involved in your child's learning.

The IEP states goals relating to the overall development of the pupil. It records that which is additional to or different from the differentiated curriculum that is already being taught to all children in the classroom situation. IEPs are not, therefore, a substitute for the curriculum being taught to all children in the school but may complement a child's access to the curriculum. The IEP gives a focus to the agreed outcomes that children with special educational needs should achieve while in school and allows their progress to be recorded.

When the EPSEN Act 2004 is fully commenced, it will provide a right for children with special educational needs to have an IEP. Although this section of the Act has not as yet been brought into force, many teachers and schools already use IEPs in their work with children with more complex special educational needs.

The NCSE has produced a booklet entitled 'Guidelines on the Individual Education Plan Process' (2006). This guide to good practice in relation to the preparation, implementation and review of IEPs is available on the [NCSE website](#).

**Every child is unique, with individual strengths and learning needs. Children should therefore have access to a range of different teaching approaches and learning programmes to meet their individual needs.**



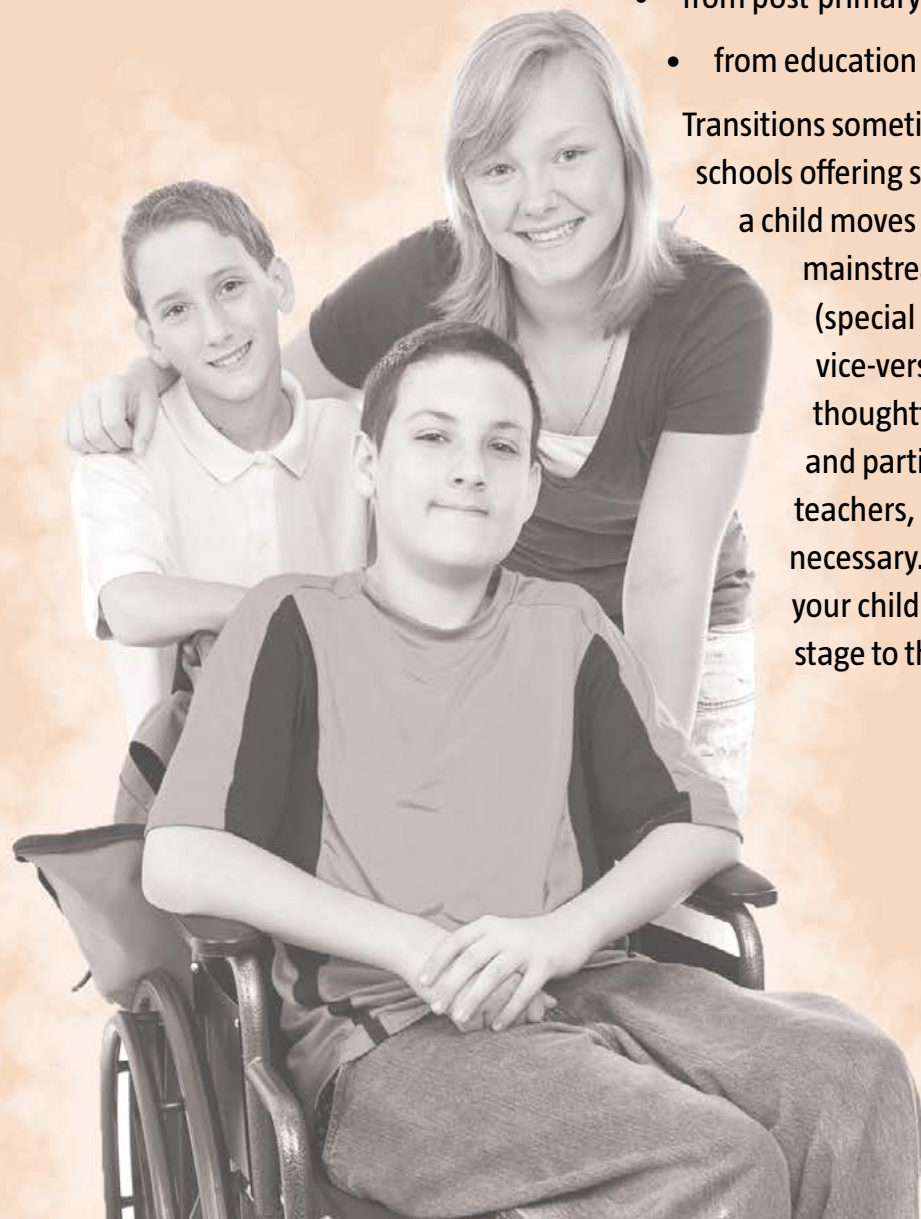
# How should Transition be Planned?

## Transitions during school life

“Transition” is the process of moving from one stage or place to another. Transitions occur throughout your child’s school life:

- from pre-school to primary
- from primary to post-primary
- from post-primary to further or higher education
- from education to adult life.

Transitions sometimes occur between mainstream schools offering similar provision, for example if a child moves house. They can also occur from mainstream to special education settings (special classes and special schools) and vice-versa. These transitions require thoughtful planning, communication and participation from you, your child, teachers, and other professionals, as necessary. This advance planning will help your child to make the transition from one stage to the next.



The following general principles are considered to be good practice in planning transition from one stage of schooling to another:

- Long-term planning is essential and should start well in advance of the point of transition.
- It is important to gather the information necessary to make an informed choice about future educational / lifelong learning settings. You should explore all of the available school options.
- Communication and collaboration between schools is crucial to ensure that all relevant information is shared and the necessary resources are put in place to facilitate a successful transition.
- The SENO can support transition by providing information to parents and liaising between schools and parents.
- The NEPS psychologist can also be involved in supporting the transition of pupils with complex special educational needs.

### **Moving into primary school**

Before attending primary school some children will already have been assessed as having a special educational need. Where this assessment has taken place under the Disability Act, 2005, the Assessment Officer will contact the local SENO. The SENO in turn will contact the parents to make them aware of the options available to their child. These options may include placement in a mainstream school, enrolment in a special class or school, support from the Visiting Teacher Service, or Home Tuition. For other children, special educational needs may not be identified until after a child has started primary school.

### **Moving into post-primary school**

The transition from primary to post-primary school can be challenging. Pupils have to cope with having more teachers, more subjects, more books, and often bigger numbers of peers and bigger buildings. They have to learn how to use their timetables, how to find their way around different classes, how to organise their books and lockers. Some pupils with special educational needs may need additional support in making this change. For children with complex special educational needs, their individual education plan can be used by the schools and the SENO to help them to make a smooth transition between primary and post-primary school.

The planning for transition needs to happen well in advance of the child's transition to post-primary school. It can be developed through a partnership approach led by the SENO and supported by the child's primary school.

The planning can include details about the child's particular learning style, their areas of strengths and needs, goals and targets for learning and the use to be made of any special education and other supports provided.

### **Moving on from post-primary mainstream schools and special schools**

There are a number of settings available for pupils with special educational needs when they leave mainstream post-primary and special schools. These include further education and training courses, vocational and rehabilitative training, third level colleges and universities. Some of these pupils may enter the work-force on leaving school.

For pupils with special educational needs, transition from post-primary school will often require support and assistance from the Guidance Counsellor or other teachers within the school. It can sometimes involve other professionals outside the school who have



responsibility in relation to students with disabilities or special educational needs, for example, an access or disability officer in a third level college.

When EPSEN is fully implemented the sections of the Act dealing with the transition of children with special educational needs will come into force. These sections include information about what must be covered under the IEP process to help the child make the transition:

- from pre-school education to primary
- from primary to post-primary education
- from post-primary to adult life.

**A successful transition depends on the ability of all those involved to communicate effectively and to share information about the child.**

# How can You Support your Child?

## **Parents as partners in education**

Many educators and health service professionals believe that the participation of parents and families is a very important factor in the success of children with special educational needs.

As a parent of a child with special educational needs, you may be actively involved in many important discussions and decisions to support your child throughout school life. These will include gathering information to help make decisions about which schools to attend, participating in the assessment process and the individual educational planning process and helping your child to make transitions from one setting to another. Many of these issues have been discussed already in this booklet.





## Everyday school life

Parents also have an important role to play in everyday school life. As parents, you can help your child to develop an organised approach to learning. Taking an interest in your child's day at school builds trust and an open relationship between you. This will serve you both well if any problems arise at school.

You can help your child to develop organisational and time management skills. For instance, you can help your child to develop a homework pattern by encouraging them to draw up a homework timetable. You can assist with homework and ask questions about how it is going and what they are learning. Consult with your child's class teacher if, over time, you become concerned that he/she is having problems or is taking a long time to complete homework. Parents can also encourage children to prepare for the next day at school by helping them to gather what they need such as equipment, uniform, lunch and so on.

Joining after school activities can help build a rounded and confident child. You can encourage your child to join some after school clubs or get involved in some activities – drama, sports, music, debating. You can also help them to be involved for these extra hours with transport, equipment, rearranging the dinner schedule and so on.

## How do schools communicate with parents?

Good home-school communication is very important and helps schools to do what is best for your child. Each school has its own way of communicating with parents and will try to use a form of communication which best suits its needs and those of parents. Many schools have websites which often have a specific section dedicated to providing information for parents.

For general information schools usually issue notices or newsletters to parents through the children. Reading school newsletters is a good way to learn about what is happening at school and the activities you and your child can be involved in. It is important that you check your child's schoolbag regularly for notes. If left unchecked younger children may produce notes weeks after they are relevant!

All schools hold parent-teacher meetings at some stage during the school year. Attending these will help you keep in touch with your child's progress. It also shows your child that you are interested in his/her progress in school.

A parent-teacher meeting enables you to:

- discuss how your child is progressing, both academically and socially
- see examples of your child's work

- get to know your child's teacher/s
- keep informed about plans for your child's future learning.

Pupil reports provide an overview of how well your child is doing at school. Parents usually receive a written report at least once a year.

Each school has an agreed code of behaviour. The principal of the school will provide parents with a copy of this code and will enlist parents' co-operation in ensuring this code is followed. All schools must also have a written school plan which parents may request to view, if they so wish.

### **How do parents communicate with schools?**

It is important that you give schools relevant information about your child's special educational needs in order to assist the school to meet their particular needs. If your child is experiencing a particular problem in school it is essential that you inform the teacher about this. There can also be times when you may want to let the teacher know about something that is affecting your child outside the school situation. It can help the teacher to understand a child who is upset if the teacher knows what the difficulty is.

If you feel your child has a problem at school, try at first to learn more from your child. Communicating with your child builds and maintains trust and honesty. If you still have concerns about your child, you should make an arrangement to see the teacher.



By making an appointment, the teacher can organise for the class to be supervised while you meet. This means that the teacher can give you his or her full attention.

### **Where do you go if you are not satisfied with your child's education/development?**

If you have concerns about your child's learning or development then it is best to try to sort out these issues in the first instance with your child's teachers and school principal. They are best placed to work with you to help resolve the problem.

If your concerns are not resolved at this stage you may contact the Chairperson of the Board of Management at the school.

**Your knowledge, views and experiences as a parent are vital in helping your child to develop. Your child is most likely to make progress if you work together in partnership with your child's school and other professionals.**



# What Organisations are there to Support your Child?

## **The National Council for Special Education**

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) was formally established under the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 (EPSEN Act) on 1st October 2005. Some of the key tasks of the NCSE outlined in Section 20 of the Act include:

- providing information to parents, schools and other stakeholders about good practice concerning the education of children with special educational needs
  - planning and co-ordinating the provision of education and support services
  - liaison with the health authorities at local level



- allocating resources to schools to support individual students with special educational needs
- carrying out research
- advising the Minister for Education and Skills about matters relating to the education of children with disabilities.

### ***Special Educational Needs Organisers***

The NCSE employs a countrywide network of about eighty Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs). SENOs provide a direct service to the parents of children with special educational needs and to schools within designated geographical areas.

Each SENO has responsibility for a list of schools (primary, post-primary and special), within the particular area they serve. At present, SENOs are mainly involved in resourcing schools to meet the needs of children with special educational needs and in ensuring that these resources are used efficiently in schools, in accordance with DES policy. A key role of the SENO is to identify the level of resources that may be sanctioned for a school to support a particular child with special educational needs and what kinds of supports the child needs to benefit from school. In doing this, SENOs must take into account professional reports and recommendations in relation to that child. They must also operate within the policies set down on these matters by the Department of Education and Skills.

SENOs have a role in supporting and advising parents of children with special educational needs.

SENOs identify possible placements for children with special educational needs, liaise with the HSE and other services, engage in discussions with schools and assist in planning the transition of children between schools and onwards from schools to further/higher education and other services.

### ***Contacting your SENO***

You can contact the SENO dealing with your area by e-mail or phone. Please appreciate that SENOs are generally in schools during the day and may not be available immediately to take your call or respond to your e-mail. Where a SENO is not in his/her office, a voice mail service is provided where you may leave a message with your contact details. The SENO will respond to your message at the earliest possible opportunity. Contact details for Special Educational Needs Organisers are available on the NCSE website ([www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie)) or through your local primary or post-primary school.

## State bodies and their agencies

### *The Department of Education and Skills*

An outline of the State Bodies and their agencies with responsibility for supporting the education of children with special educational needs is given below in Figure 1:

**Figure 1: Department of Education and Skills – its Services and Agencies**

<b>Department of Education and Skills: Services</b>	
DES Inspectorate	Inspects and evaluates the quality of schooling, advises on educational policy and supports teacher and school management. <a href="http://www.education.ie/">http://www.education.ie/</a>
DES Special Education Section	The Special Education Section of the Department of Education and Skills provides for a range of resources and supports for learners with special educational needs and also develops associated policy in the area of special educational needs, in conjunction with relevant stakeholders. More information is available on: <a href="http://www.education.ie/">http://www.education.ie/</a>
National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)	The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) is a service funded by the Department of Education and Skills. NEPS psychologists specialise in working with the school community in both primary and post-primary schools. They are concerned with learning, behaviour, social and emotional development. Each psychologist is assigned to a group of schools. They work in partnership with teachers, parents and children in identifying and helping children with special educational needs. They offer a range of services, for example, supporting individual students (through consultation and assessment), special projects and research. More information is available on: <a href="http://www.education.ie/">http://www.education.ie/</a>
Special Education Support Services (SESS)	The role of the Special Education Support Service (SESS) is to enhance the quality of learning and teaching in relation to special educational provision. The service co-ordinates, develops and delivers a range of professional development initiatives and support structures for school personnel working with students with special educational needs in mainstream primary and post-primary schools and special schools. The SESS operates under the remit of the Teacher Education Section (TES) of the Department of Education and Skills. More information is available on: <a href="http://www.sess.ie/">http://www.sess.ie/</a>
National Behaviour Support Service	The National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) provides support and expertise to post-primary schools on issues related to behaviour. More information is available on: <a href="http://www.nbss.ie/">http://www.nbss.ie/</a>

<b>Department of Education and Skills: Agencies</b>	
National Council for Special Education (NCSE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinates education services for persons with special educational needs, with particular emphasis on children.</li> <li>• Sanctions resource teaching and SNA supports to schools to meet the needs of children with special educational needs.</li> <li>• Makes recommendations to the DES in respect of applications for assistive technology, school transport and Home Tuition in respect of children with special educational needs.</li> <li>• More information is available on: <a href="http://www.ncse.ie/">http://www.ncse.ie/</a></li> </ul>
National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB)	<p>The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) is the national agency for encouraging and supporting school attendance. It has the responsibility for ensuring that every child either attends a school or otherwise receives an education. More information is available on: <a href="http://www.newb.ie/">http://www.newb.ie/</a></p>
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	<p>The NCCA mission is to advise the Minister for Education and Skills on curriculum and assessment for early childhood education and for primary and post-primary schools. The NCCA has published guidelines on teaching pupils with special educational needs and is a good source of information on the requirements of your child's syllabus or course of study. More information is available on: <a href="http://www.ncca.ie/">http://www.ncca.ie/</a></p>

### ***The Health Service Executive (HSE)***

The HSE provides:

- health supports including therapeutic supports
- assessments of need (AON) for children under 5 years which are accessed through local health offices
- early intervention services for children with special educational needs.

# Where can You get more Information about your Child's Special Educational Needs?

There are many organisations set up to support parents and families of children with disabilities. Please see below for a list and website addresses of some of these organisations. Parents should be careful when using websites to make sure that the information being provided is accurate and up to date.





Please note that these organisations are listed only for information purposes. The National Council for Special Education may have had no involvement with these organisations and cannot vouch for them or their staff. Parents should always satisfy themselves regarding the appropriateness of providing any information concerning their child to any third-party.

## Access

Accessibility: <http://www.assistireland.ie/eng/Home/>;  
<http://www.accessireland.info/>

Enable Ireland: <http://www.enableireland.ie/parents>

Institute for Design and Disability: <http://www.idd.ie/>

## Benefits and allowances

Carer's Allowance: <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Schemes/IllnessDisabilityAndCaring/Carers/CarersAllowance/Pages/ca.aspx>

Carers Benefit: <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Schemes/IllnessDisabilityAndCaring/Carers/CarersBenefit/Pages/carb.aspx>

Department of Health: The Department of Health links to the Citizens Information website for the provision of information on Illness and disability: <http://www.dohc.ie/public/healthinfo/>  
<http://www.citizensinformation.ie/categories/health/health-services-for-people-with-disabilities/health-services-for-people-with-intellectual-physical-or-sensory-disabilities>

Disability Allowance: <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Schemes/IllnessDisabilityAndCaring/PeoplewithDisabilities/DisabilityAllowance/Pages/da.aspx>

Illness Benefit – (formerly Disability Benefit) <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Schemes/IllnessDisabilityAndCaring/Illness/IllnessBenefit/Pages/ib.aspx>

Disablement Benefit: <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Schemes/IllnessDisabilityAndCaring/IllnessOccupationalInjuries/DisablementBenefit/Pages/disable.aspx>

Housing – Disabled Person's Housing Grant:  
<http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/SpecialNeeds/PeoplewithaDisability/>

## Disability organisations

### General

Centres for Independent Living – Location map of centres:  
<http://www.dublincil.org/>

Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI): <http://www.disability-federation.ie/>

The website of the Disability Federation of Ireland includes a full list of all voluntary bodies associated with DFI and links to their websites:

<http://www.disability-federation.ie/index.php?uniqueID=161>

National Learning Network: <http://nln.ie/>

## ***Sensory disabilities***

### **Blindness**

Féach: <http://www.feach.ie/>

Fighting Blindness: <http://www.fightingblindness.ie/>

Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind: <http://www.guidedogs.ie/>

National Council for the Blind in Ireland: <http://www.ncbi.ie/>

St. Joseph's Centre for the Visually Impaired: <http://www.stjosephsvi.ie/>

### **DEAF and Hard Of Hearing**

Catholic Institute for Deaf people: <http://www.cidp.ie/>

DeafHear: <http://www.deafhear.ie/>

Irish Deaf Society: <http://www.irishdeafsociety.ie/>

Irish Hard of Hearing Association: <http://www.ihha.ie>

The Irish Deaf – online directory: <http://www.irishdeaf.com>

## ***Physical disabilities***

Migraine Ireland: <http://www.migraine.ie/>

Neurological Alliance of Ireland: <http://www.nai.ie/>

The Irish Epilepsy Association: <http://www.epilepsy.ie/>

Brain research: <http://www.brainresearch.ie/>

Central Remedial Clinic: <http://www.crc.ie>

Enable Ireland: <http://www.enableireland.ie/>

Irish Kidney Association: <http://www.ika.ie/>

Irish Wheelchair Association: <http://www.iwa.ie/>

Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Society Ireland: <http://www.ms-society.ie/>

Muscular Dystrophy Ireland: <http://www.mdi.ie/>

Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus Ireland: <http://www.sbhi.ie>

## ***Intellectual disabilities***

Acquired Brain Injury Ireland (formerly Peter Bradley Foundation): <http://www.abiireland.ie/>

Down Syndrome Ireland: <http://www.downsyndrome.ie>

Inclusion Ireland (formerly National Association for the Mentally Handicapped of Ireland):  
<http://www.inclusionireland.ie/>

Headway Ireland- support and services to people affected by brain injury:  
<http://www.headwayireland.ie/>

National Federation of Voluntary Bodies – association of voluntary bodies providing services to persons with intellectual disability and their families: <http://www.fedvol.ie/>

St. John of Gods Services for people with intellectual disabilities: <http://www.sjog.ie/>

St. Michael's House – Specialised day and residential services for people with learning disabilities throughout Dublin city and county: <http://www.smh.ie/>

Sunbeam House Services – provides training, employment and care services for adults with a learning disability: <http://www.sunbeam.ie>

## **Autism**

Asperger Support Ireland: <http://www.autismireland.ie/services-in-your-area>

Autism Support Ireland: <http://www.autismsupport.ie/>

Irish Autism Action: <http://www.autismireland.ie/>

Irish Society for Autism: <http://www.autism.ie/>

## **Specific learning disability**

Dyslexia Association: <http://www.dyslexia.ie/>

Dyspraxia Association of Ireland: <http://www.dyspraxia.ie/>

## **Specific speech & language difficulty**

Irish Association of Speech & Language Therapists (IASLT): <http://www.iaslt.ie/>

## **Mental and emotional disabilities**

Aware – Helping Defeat Depression: <http://www.aware.ie>

Camphill – Camphill Communities of Ireland is part of an international charitable trust working with people with intellectual and other disabilities:  
<http://www.camphill.ie/What-is-Camphill-p-6.html>

Mental Health Ireland: <http://www.mentalhealthireland.ie/>

## **Equality and human rights**

Equality Authority: <http://www.equality.ie/>

Equal Status Act 2000: <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2000/en/act/pub/0008/index.html>

Irish Council for Civil Liberties: <http://www.iccl.ie/about-the-iccl-2.html>

The Equality Tribunal: <http://www.equalitytribunal.ie/index.asp>

## **Events**

Special Olympics: <http://www.specialolympics.ie/>

Ability Awards: <http://theabilityawards.com/>

## **Government**

Irish Government – information on the Irish State: <http://www.irlgov.ie/>

Department of Social Protection: <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Pages/default.aspx>

Department of Health: <http://www.dohc.ie/>

Department of Justice and Equality: <http://www.justice.ie>

Department of Education & Skills: <http://www.education.ie/>

National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS): <http://www.education.ie/home/home.jsp?maincat=33437&pcategory=33437&ecategory=33437&sectionpage=27692&language=EN&link=&page=1>



## International links

European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD): <http://www.easpd.eu/>

European Disability Forum: <http://www.edf-feph.org>

Disability World – online magazine: <http://www.disabilityworld.org/>

Institute of Independent Living: <http://www.independentliving.org/>

Inclusion Europe – European Association of Societies for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities and their Families: <http://www.inclusion-europe.org/>

## Public services

Contact information for public services in Ireland:

<http://www.citizensinformation.ie/categories>

Information Commissioner, the Office of: [www.irlgov.ie/oic](http://www.irlgov.ie/oic)

Ombudsman and Disability:

<http://www.ombudsman.gov.ie/en/DisabilityAct2005/>

Social Inclusion Division of the Department of Social Protection – working for the prevention and elimination of poverty and social exclusion:

<http://www.socialinclusion.ie/> and <http://www.combatpoverty.ie/index.html>

## State agencies

National Council for Special Education: <http://www.ncse.ie/>

National Education Welfare Board: <http://www.newb.ie/>

National Disability Authority: <http://www.nda.ie>

Health Service Executive: [http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/Find\\_a\\_Service/](http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/Find_a_Service/)

Youthreach – Early School leavers: <http://www.youthreach.ie>

## Support services

Live Advisor: [http://www.citizensinformationboard.ie/services/accessibility\\_services/liveadvisor.html](http://www.citizensinformationboard.ie/services/accessibility_services/liveadvisor.html)

Live advisor is an instant chat service operating between the hours of 9am – 5pm (Monday – Friday), which is specifically targeted towards people with hearing and speech difficulties and others who have difficulty communicating by telephone.

Muiriosa: <http://www.muiriosa.ie/>

Muiriosa Foundation provides a range of services and supports to persons with an intellectual disability (and their families) – residential services, respite, day services, education, and multidisciplinary supports – across six midland counties.

National Adult Literacy Agency: <http://www.nala.ie/>

National Parents Council Primary: <http://www.npc.ie/>

National Parents Council Post-Primary: <http://www.npcpp.ie/>

Rehab Care – training, employment, social care and commercial services:

<http://www.rehab.ie>

Samaritans: [http://www.samaritans.org/talk\\_to\\_someone/find\\_my\\_local\\_branch/ireland.aspx](http://www.samaritans.org/talk_to_someone/find_my_local_branch/ireland.aspx)

Special Needs Parents Association: <http://www.specialneedsparents.ie/>

## Travel and transport

Bus Eireann – disabled access: <http://www.buseireann.ie/inner.php?id=120>

Disabled Drivers Association: <http://www.ddai.ie/>

Dublin Airport – Travellers with a disability:

<http://www.dublinairport.com/plan-your-trip/reduced-mobility/>

Dublin Bus – disabled access:

<http://www.dublinbus.ie/en/Your-Journey1/Accessibility/>

Irish Rail – disabled access:

[http://www.irishrail.ie/your\\_journey/disabled\\_access.asp](http://www.irishrail.ie/your_journey/disabled_access.asp)

Luas – Light Rail Transit System, Dublin: <http://www.luas.ie/luas-accessibility.html>

## Appendix 1:

# Definitions of Special Educational Needs

### **Borderline mild general learning disability**

This category consists of children who have been assessed by a psychologist as having a borderline mild general learning disability (DES Circular Special Education 08/02).

### **Mild general learning disability**

This category consists of pupils who have been assessed by a psychologist as having a mild general learning disability (DES Circular Special Education 08/02).

### **Specific learning disability**

This category includes children who have been assessed by a psychologist as:

- being of average intellectual ability or higher
- having a degree of learning disability specific to basic skills in reading, writing or mathematics which places them at or below the 2nd percentile<sup>2</sup> on suitable, standardised, norm-referenced tests.\*

Children who do not meet the above criteria and, who in the opinion of the psychologist, have a specific learning disability are more properly the responsibility of the learning support teacher and/or the class teacher (Circular Sp Ed 08/02).

### **Physical disability**

Pupils have permanent or protracted disabilities arising from such conditions as:

- congenital deformities
- spina bifida
- dyspraxia
- muscular dystrophy

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<sup>2</sup> Percentiles represent a way of measuring a child's performance in a standardised test and comparing it to all others of the same age or stage of education who have taken the test at the same time. If a child is at the second percentile, it means that 98 per cent of the results of children of that age or at the same stage of education were higher. If a child is at the twenty fifth percentile, it means that 75% of the results were higher than the child's and so on.

- cerebral palsy
- brittle bones
- severe accidental injury.

Because of the impairment of their physical function they require special additional intervention and support if they are to have available to them a level and quality of education appropriate to their needs and abilities.

Many require the use of a wheelchair, mobility or seating aid, or other technological support.

They may suffer from a lack of muscular control and co-ordination and may have difficulties in communication, particularly in oral articulation, as for example severe dyspraxia.

Pupils with a physical disability who have learning difficulties arising from the disability *may* need resource teaching where there are consequent significant learning difficulties. Others may need assistive technology only (DES Circular Special Education 02/05).

## Hearing impairment

This includes pupils who have a hearing disability that is so serious as to impair significantly their capacity to hear and understand human speech. This prevents the child from participating fully in classroom interaction and from benefiting adequately from school instruction. The great majority of these children have been prescribed hearing aids and are availing of the services of a Visiting Teacher.

This category is not intended to include pupils with mild hearing loss (DES Circular Special Education 02/05).

Note: Hearing loss is measured in decibels and can be mild, moderate, severe or profound (Special Education Review Committee (SERC) Report, 1993).

Levels of hearing loss as defined in the SERC report are illustrated in the following table:

Minimum audible intensity	Level of impairment
20-30 decibels	Mildly Hard of Hearing
30-60 decibels	Moderately hard of hearing
60-89 decibels	Severely hard of hearing
90 decibels or over	Profoundly Deaf

## Blind/visual impairment

Pupils have a visual disability which is so serious as to impair significantly their capacity to see, thus interfering with their capacity to perceive visually presented materials, such as pictures, diagrams, and the written word. Some will have been diagnosed as suffering from conditions such as congenital blindness, cataracts, albinism and retinitis pigmentosa. Most require the use of low-vision aids and are availing of the services of a Visiting Teacher (*This category is not intended to include those pupils whose visual difficulties are satisfactorily corrected by the wearing of spectacles and/or contact lenses*) (DES Circular Special Education 02/05).

## Emotional disturbance and/or behaviour problems

Pupils are being treated by a psychiatrist or psychologist for such conditions as neurosis, childhood psychosis, hyperactivity, attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and conduct disorders that significantly impair their socialisation and/or learning in school. (*This category is not intended to include pupils whose conduct or behavioural difficulties can be dealt with in accordance with agreed procedures on discipline*).

Some pupils in this category may need resource teaching support. Care support from a special needs assistant may be required where a pupil's behaviour is a danger to himself or others or where it seriously interferes with the learning opportunities of other pupils. In certain circumstances, some pupils may require both supports (DES Circular Special Education 02/05).

## Severe emotional disturbance and/or behaviour problems (severe EBD)

A child with severe EBD must be in the care of a psychiatrist or clinical psychologist for a severe clinical disorder. A very small number of pupils would be expected to fall within this category.

## Moderate general learning disability

This category includes pupils who have been assessed by a psychologist as having a moderate general learning disability (DES Circular Special Education 02/05).

## **Severe and profound general learning disability**

This category includes pupils who have been assessed by a psychologist as having a severe or profound general learning disability. In addition, such pupils may have physical disabilities (DES Circular Special Education 02/05).

## **Autism/autistic spectrum disorder (ASD)**

This category includes pupils who have been assessed and classified by a psychiatrist or psychologist as having autism or autistic spectrum disorder according to DSM-IV, DSM-V or ICD-10 criteria.

In the interest of the pupil with an ASD and in order that the needs of the pupil are adequately addressed, it is important, where feasible, that for a definitive assessment of ASD, a multi-disciplinary assessment team should be involved. The need for a multi-disciplinary assessment is also in keeping with NEPS policy (DES Circular Special Education 02/05).

## **Pupils with special educational needs arising from an assessed syndrome**

The level of additional support to be provided for pupils who present with a particular syndrome, for example Down syndrome, William's syndrome and Tourette's syndrome, will be determined following consideration of psychological or other specialist reports which describe the nature and degree of the pupils' special educational needs (DES Circular Special Education 02/05).

## **Specific speech and language disorder (SSLD):**

This category includes:

- pupils assessed by a psychologist on a standardised test of intelligence that places non verbal or performance ability within the average range or above
- pupils assessed by a speech therapist on a standardised test of language development that places performances in one or more of the main areas of speech and language development at two standard deviations or more below the mean, or at a generally equivalent level
- pupils whose difficulties are not attributable to hearing impairment; where the pupil is affected to some degree by hearing impairment, the hearing threshold for the speech-related frequencies should be 40Db

- pupils whose emotional and behavioural disorders or a physical disability are not considered to be primary causes of the difficulty experienced.

This category is not intended to include pupils with speech and language delays and difficulties. Two assessments, a psychological assessment and a speech and language assessment are necessary in this case (DES Circular Special Education 02/05).

### **Multiple disabilities**

Pupils assessed with multiple disabilities meet the criteria for two or more of the low incidence disabilities described above (DES Circular Special Education 02/05).



## Appendix 2:

# The Broader Legislative Framework

There have been many changes in the way special education is delivered in Ireland in recent decades. Some of the main changes have come about because a legislative framework has been put in place to address the needs of children with special educational needs. There are four key pieces of legislation which parents should be aware of. These are:

- [The Education Act 1998](#)
- [The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs \(EPSEN\) Act 2004](#)
- [The Disability Act 2005](#)
- [The Education \(Welfare\) Act 2000.](#)

There are a number of other pieces of legislation which are also relevant to children and parents with special educational needs. These include Ireland's [Data Protection Act 1988](#) and as amended in [2003](#), Equality Acts ([Employment Equality Act 1998](#), the [Equal Status Acts 2000](#) and as amended in [the Equality Act 2004](#)) and the [Freedom of Information Act 1997](#) and its [amendment, 2003](#).

Some key features of this broad legal framework and how it might be relevant to you are outlined below. The full text of all of these Acts can be viewed at:

<http://www.oireachtas.ie/>

## The Education Act 1998

This was the first law enacted in Ireland to deal with education. One of the objectives of the Act is to give practical effect to the constitutional rights of children, including children who have a disability or who have other special educational needs. Schools are required to ensure that the educational needs of all students, including those with a disability or other special educational needs are identified and provided for.

The Education Act requires that schools use their available resources to ensure that the educational needs of all pupils, including those with disabilities and special educational needs are identified and provided for. It also gives the Minister for Education and Skills the function:

‘to ensure that there is made available to each person resident in the State, including a person with a disability or who has other special educational needs, support services and a level of quality of education appropriate to meeting the needs and abilities of that person (Section 7 (1) (a)).

## The Disability Act 2005

The Disability Act is designed to promote the participation of people with disabilities in society by supporting the provision of disability specific services and improving access to mainstream public services. The Act establishes a right to an independent assessment of individual needs and a related service statement.

On 1st June 2007, Part 2 of the Disability Act became law for children under the age of five years, giving them a right to an independent assessment of need. Assessment Officers (HSE) and SENOs (NCSE) work together at a local level in relation to these assessments of need which take place under Section 8(3) of the Disability Act for children under the age of five years.

## The Data Protection Acts (1988, 1998 and 2003)

The Data Protection Acts are designed to protect the rights of individuals with regard to personal data that is held about them by public agencies either on computer files or in paper files.

Public agencies are required to act in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Acts and in accordance with any other guidance in relation to the acts provided by the Data Protection Commissioner about the management of information on individual pupils.

Essentially data protection legislation is designed to ensure that any information held on record about you or your child by a public body:

- is held only with your consent
- is accurate, up to date and treated confidentially
- is used only for the purposes for which you gave consent.

The Data Protection Commissioner has produced a range of user friendly guides to this legislation which are available at [www.dataprotection.ie](http://www.dataprotection.ie).

## Freedom of Information Act (1998)

The Freedom of Information Act (FOI Act) came into effect on 21 April, 1998 and was amended on 11 April 2003. Under this Act you have a right to access records held by Government departments and certain public bodies. The National Council for Special Education is one of the bodies covered by the FOI Act. The Government department or body must give you an explanation if you are not given a copy of the records you have requested. Further information about the Freedom of Information Act is available at [www.foi.gov.ie](http://www.foi.gov.ie).

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