

The Role of the Special Needs Assistant

Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection

(Rapporteur Senator Mary Moran)

Recommendations

- **Recommendation 1:** The duties and function of the SNA need to be effectively, directly and regularly communicated to parents, teachers, principals and school staff. The role is subject to misinterpretation and as a result has expanded to include responsibilities which do not follow the Department of Education and Skills Circular 0030/2014. Through early communication with each of these groups the SNA is supported to carry out the role as defined and appropriate expectations are set. The NCSE should undertake regional meetings through local SENOs with parents, teachers, principals and school staff to discuss the SNA Scheme and special education resources. Continuous professional development and third level education for principals and teachers should provide training on the management and appropriate function of the role in the classroom and wider school setting.
- **Recommendation 2:** Every attempt should be made to complete the review of the SNA Scheme undertaken by the Department of Education and Skills in time for the 2016/2017 academic year and in direct consultation with educational stakeholders.
- **Recommendation 3:** The Department of Education and Skills should require SNAs to participate in the Individualised Education Plan of the student/students who they provide support to as it relates to ‘care needs’. The SNA has an important role to play in providing information for the care plan of the student/students.
- **Recommendation 4:** A mandatory, standardised training and course structure needs to be developed and implemented. A clear and defined structure would achieve further professionalization of the role, set a minimum standard of qualification for all SNAs and would provide the necessary skills needed at primary and post-primary to fulfil their roles most effectively.
- **Recommendation 5:** A mandatory, standardised training and course structure needs to address the different levels of support as it relates to primary and post-primary. Students at different stages in their educational careers may require different levels of SNA support particularly in the transition from primary to post-primary. Any further training or courses which become available in future should address the differences at these levels.
- **Recommendation 6:** A Continuous Professional Development programme which provides equal regional access needs to be introduced for SNAs as soon as practicable. Over the course of any new career, new methods and information become available which directly impacts on the work. SNAs should be provided with opportunities to avail of CPD relevant to their work and similar to that of teachers. SNAs should be allowed to participate in CPD for teachers where open places are available and receive certification on completion.
- **Recommendation 7:** Appropriate training needs to be provided through CPD, initial training courses or by a medical health professional regarding the administration of medications and specifically for catheterization.
- **Recommendation 8:** The minimum criteria of three grade D’s in the Junior Certificate or FETAC Level 3 major qualification on the National Framework of Qualifications as set out in the Department of Education and Skills Circular 0021/2011 needs to be urgently reviewed. Consideration could be given to replacing the current minimum criteria in DES Circular 0021/2011 with a standard training course which may carry a FETAC level qualification.

- **Recommendation 9:** SNA allocations need to be made at an earlier date in order to provide SNAs with the appropriate notice of their employment in advance of the upcoming school year. Earlier allocations would also be beneficial for parents and students as they will have clear knowledge of the SNA support they may or may not be receiving for the upcoming school year. A March or April allocation deadline would be preferable for the majority of allocations with additional time available in May and June if necessary.
- **Recommendation 10:** The Department of Education and Skills need to ensure that SNA posts are not made available through Jobbridge.
- **Recommendation 11:** In future circulars, the Department of Education and Skills should include a strong and clear statement of priority that the care needs of the student are paramount before any other secondary duty or task which may be assigned to an SNA.
- **Recommendation 12:** The Department of Education and Skills and the National Council for Special Education need to consider the potential benefits for students and the wider classroom of using the wide range of skills possessed by SNAs which may aid in the learning process and management of the classroom.
- **Recommendation 13:** A mandatory course on special education should be introduced at Bachelor's degree level and Masters of Education level for teachers. This course would outline the role of the SNA and how to work collaboratively with the SNA in the classroom.