

Mr. Andy Pike
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By email: apike@forsa.ie

15 May 2020

Re: Provision of remote learning support to SEN students by Special Needs Assistants

Dear Andy,

I refer to your letter of 11 May regarding the above matter.

As you are aware, the Minister for Education and Skills announced on April 1st a contingency plan for all Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) to be available for a new temporary assignment scheme. The scheme is an important element of the Government's response to Covid-19.

The HSE has finalised the details of the service which SNAs will provide during the school closure period and it is expected that the HSE will very shortly begin matching SNAs to families and children identified in their services.

As you stated in your letter, the Department of Education and Skills '*Guidance on Continuity of Schooling: Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs*' document provides a framework for SEN Teachers and SNAs to maintain contact with SEN students and to provide appropriate learning support. The Department acknowledges and welcomes the fact that many SNAs have been engaged in such work through their schools since the closure period began and also welcomes the union's support for such provision.

In order to continue and strengthen that service to SEN students, the Department has now confirmed to schools and ETBs that, in the interim period pending the assignment of an individual SNA to the HSE, that SNA is available to support their allocated students through their school. A copy of that communication was previously sent to you and I enclose it again for ease of reference. Contemporaneous public health advice provided by the National Public Health Emergency Team and the terms of Circular 0024/2020, which sets out the special arrangements to cater for COVID-19 for SNAs, must of course be complied with in this regard.

The interaction of such support through schools with the HSE assignment process can be the subject of further discussion as required through our regular weekly meetings.

In terms of the second issue - the SNA contract at primary level provides that the holiday periods for an SNA will be those which apply to primary schools, whose final term typically finishes at the end of June. The second level contract states that SNAs are required to work the month of June. It is a provision of the temporary assignment scheme generally that staff will not be required to work beyond their contracted hours and I can confirm that this provision applies in the case of SNAs.

As you are aware, one of the key aims of the assignment scheme is to provide an integrated approach to meeting the health and education needs of children with special education needs and their families during this unprecedented period and we welcome the collaborative effort between this Department, Department of Health, HSE and Fórsa towards this aim.

Consideration is ongoing in terms of the continuation of support for children and families during the summer period until schools re-open. This includes consideration of a summer education programme along the lines of the traditional Extended School Year Programme (July Provision). Account of course has to be taken of the public health restrictions in place and the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business published by Government on 1 May. There will be consultation with stakeholders in due course.

I trust that this clarifies the Department's position in respect of the above matters. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require further information.

Yours sincerely,

Tara Carton
Principal Officer
External Staff Relations