



Circular Number 0032/2026

To the Managerial Authorities of Recognised Primary, Post-Primary and Special Schools, and to the Chief Executive Officers of the Educational Training Boards

The Role of Special Needs Assistants in recognised Primary, Post-Primary and Special Schools

The role of the special needs assistant (SNA) is to provide recognised primary, post-primary and special schools with additional adult support to facilitate the attendance, participation and inclusion in school of students with special educational needs to enable them to achieve their full potential.

NOTE: This circular should be read in conjunction with The Role of Special Needs Assistants (SNA) Circular 0032/2026 - Guidance Document, May 2026 which provides further detail and clarifications on matters addressed in this circular.

Please ensure that the contents of this circular are brought to the attention of all members of staff in your employment, including those on leave of absence.

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1 Purpose of circular

The purpose of this circular is to provide information for SNAs, members of school senior leadership teams, teachers and other school staff, boards of management, patrons, school managerial authorities, parents and the whole-school community on the role, responsibilities and duties of the SNA.

The information contained in this circular is based on research and consultation carried out by the [Department of Education and Youth \(department\)](#). It is also informed by Article 23 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which recognises that children with disabilities have the right to have effective access to and receive special care, education, and training, to help them achieve the fullest possible social integration and individual development. This circular is also informed by Article 7 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

This circular supersedes department circular letters 30/2014 and 71/2011. This circular does not make any changes to the arrangements for the allocation of SNA support to mainstream classes in primary and post-primary schools, which are set out in the SNA allocations circular published annually by the department.

This circular should be read in conjunction with relevant legislative provisions and associated documents and information published by the department from time to time, including, but not limited to, the documents listed in [Appendix 1](#), and any future iterations of these documents.

2 Glossary of terms and definitions

For the purposes of this circular the following terms shall have the meanings assigned to them herein unless the context indicates otherwise:



- **Board:** refers to the board of management of a school and has the meaning assigned to it in the Education Act 1998 (the Education Act) and for the purposes of this circular includes an Education and Training Board (ETB) in the case of a school under the patronage of the ETB.
- **Core care needs:** (formerly known as supporting primary care needs) refers to priority care needs as set out in section 7.1 below.
- **Delegate:** refers to a person designated by the board, school principal, to act on their behalf, including the deputy principal and teachers.
- **Department:** Department of Education and Youth.
- **ESC:** refers to an Education Support Centre – as provided for under Section 37 of the Education Act, offering services to schools, teachers, parents, boards and other relevant persons which support them in carrying out their functions in respect of the provision of education.
- **Learning:** is used in a holistic manner and incorporates students' skills development across areas including literacy, numeracy, language and communication, sensory, physical, social and emotional development.
- **NCSE:** National Council for Special Education.
- **NEPS:** National Educational Psychological Service.
- **Parent** has the meaning assigned in the Education Act, 1998 – includes a foster parent, a guardian appointed under the Guardianship of Children Acts, 1964 to 1997, or other person acting in loco parentis who has a child in his or her care subject to any statutory power or order of a court and, in the case of a child who has been adopted under the Adoption Acts, 1952 to 1998, or, where the child has been adopted outside the State, means the adopter or adopters or the surviving adopter.
- **School:** has the meaning assigned to it in the Education Act – a primary or post-primary school recognised by the Minister in accordance with section 10 of the Education Act 1998.
- **SENO:** Special educational needs organiser - in accordance with Section 26 of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004.



- **Special Needs Assistant (SNA)** has the meaning as set out in the provision of this circular.
- **Special educational needs:** has the meaning assigned to it in the EPSEN Act 2004: Special educational needs means, in relation to a person, 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.
- **Student:** means a child or young person enrolled at a recognised school.
- **Student support duties:** (formerly known as support for secondary care associated tasks) refers to duties carried out by an SNA in accordance with this circular, other than support for core care needs.
- **Student support file:** provides a process for recording and collating all information in relation to the student, in order to plan interventions aligned to their identified strengths, interests and needs, and to facilitate the documentation of their response to intervention. It tracks a student's pathway through the Continuum of Support and guides which supports, and evidence informed interventions are most appropriate.
- **Student support plan (SSP):** is the individualised learning and care plan that sets out the student's strengths, interests and needs, as well as the priority learning and care needs that have been agreed as the basis for targets and interventions. This plan is reviewed and revised regularly throughout the school year. It is a key part of the larger student support file.
- **Teacher:** means a qualified professional registered with the Teaching Council, who under the direction of the principal, facilitates learning and personal development of students in recognised schools, as provided for in the Education Act. This includes the class teacher and special education teacher in primary school, the class teacher and post-primary subject teachers in special schools and the subject teacher and special education teacher in post-primary schools unless otherwise stated. Substitute teachers employed by schools in line with department policy are also included in this definition.



- **Whole-school community:** means school leaders, management, teaching and non-teaching staff, students, parents and the wider local community.

3 The role of the SNA

The primary role of the SNA is to provide adult support to meet the core care needs (see [section 7](#)) of students in the school community to enable their successful inclusion to attend, participate and reach their full potential in school with their peers.

It should not be assumed that all students who have special educational needs require access to SNA support. It should also not be assumed that the allocation of additional SNA support is a requirement for a student with special educational needs to attend school.

The SNA is an integral member of the whole school community, that works together to create and maintain positive, productive, safe and inclusive learning environment for all students. The essential support provided by SNAs facilitates students with diverse ranges of special educational needs to access and participate in learning and to participate in and be included as fully as possible in school life.

The department through the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) provides for SNA support in recognised schools. SNA duties are assigned by the principal, or delegate of the principal or the board in accordance with this circular, department policy and NCSE guidance.

The school shall ensure that SNAs are well placed to provide tailored support to the student(s) with special educational needs. This shall include providing SNAs with access to relevant information about the student(s) they are supporting, including the student support plan (SSP).



3.1 Core care needs and student support duties

The SNA, under the direction of the principal or delegate, shall ensure support for core care needs of students. Information on core care needs is set out in [section 7.1](#) of this circular.

When the core care needs of students have been met during the school day, SNAs shall fulfil additional duties. These additional duties are referred to as student support duties and are detailed in [section 8](#) of this circular.

As with core care needs, student support duties, are assigned by the principal, delegate or the board in accordance with this circular and associated department policy and NCSE guidance. Further information on deployment of SNA support can be found in [section 14](#) of this circular and in the supporting guidance document.

3.2 Fostering independence

SNAs play a vital role in the whole school community developing and fostering students' independence, thereby contributing to the students' overall wellbeing.

The SNA shall work in collaboration with the teacher(s) to encourage and empower students by allowing them, as appropriate and in line with the individual targets set out in their student support plan, to take on manageable tasks which build their confidence and self-esteem.

The SNA shall work in collaboration with the teacher(s) to support a range of learning skills across areas including literacy, numeracy, language and communication, sensory, physical, social and emotional development.

SNAs shall support students to develop independent living skills, such as toileting, mobility, and emotional regulation, as required, and where appropriate in accordance with the SSP.



SNA support shall always be at a level that will ensure that students' needs are met, without impacting on the development of the student's independent living and functional skills. Strategies and staff roles and responsibilities in supporting the student should be set out in the student's individual student support plan. This SSP should be reviewed and monitored regularly as set out in point 3.4.

3.3 Supporting student wellbeing

It is an important part of the SNA role to build positive and trusting relationships with students, facilitating a sense of security, connection and belonging so that the student feels that they are a valued member of the school community.

The SNA role in supporting the wellbeing of the student shall include, as required:

- Fostering independence and promoting the self-esteem of the student.
- Encouraging the student to actively engage and participate in their learning, working towards goals that are meaningful to them.
- Supporting students to develop organisational skills to enhance readiness for learning.
- Helping the student feel confident in their abilities and promoting a positive relationship with learning.
- Helping the student to express their thoughts and feelings and supporting their regulation.
- Respecting and valuing the voice of the student by ensuring their voice is included, responded to and has influence where appropriate.
- Facilitating the student to develop positive interactions with peers and supporting their development of positive relationships.
- Facilitating the students' communication using their preferred mode of communication including augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) approaches.
- Advocating for the student's needs in collaboration with other adults in the whole-school community.



3.4 Student planning and review

The SNA shall be included in the development, implementation and review of student support plans.

This process is led by a member of the teaching staff who is involved in the student's education, typically a teacher or special education teacher, as directed by the principal or delegate. The development and review of the student support plan is collaborative and includes relevant teacher(s) and special education teachers, SNAs, the parent(s), the student and other relevant professionals (where applicable).

The collaborative planning process is detailed in the guidelines for schools - published by the department in the Supporting Young People with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Classes documents for both primary and post-primary schools (see link to guidelines in [Appendix 1 - Associated documents](#)) and generally consists of the following steps:

- Identify priority areas of need for targeted intervention using the problem-solving process.
- Develop a student support plan which includes:
 - Specific Measurable Achievable Relevant and Timebound (SMART) targets.
 - The level and type of support to be provided.
 - The personnel involved in implementation of interventions.
 - The review of the student's response to interventions.

The contribution of the SNA, in this collaborative process is essential in each of these steps. SNAs work closely with the students and can contribute unique and valuable insight to support the development of a tailored planning and review process resulting in the best student outcomes.



4 The role of the school principal

As provided for in section 23 of the Education Act 1998, the functions of a school principal in a recognised school include being responsible for the day-to-day management of the school, including guidance and direction of the teachers and other staff of the school, the implementation of school policy, and being accountable to the board of the school for that management.

The principal provides leadership to staff and students in the school. The principal must collaborate with the board, parents, students and school staff to create a safe, secure, supportive learning environment and set and monitor school objectives in consultation with stakeholders.

The principal has responsibility for deploying staff within the school which may include appointing a delegate to fulfil this duty. The principal will ensure to set clear expectations on the role and duties of the staff in the school, including SNAs, in line with relevant policies, procedures and guidance documents.

The principal is also responsible for:

- Deployment of SNA staff.
- Identification of SNA training requirements, including ongoing training and upskilling as required and induction training for new SNAs. Clearly communicating the role and responsibilities of the SNA as set out in this circular and guidance document.
- Ensuring SNAs have access to relevant information about the student(s) they are supporting, including the SSP.

5 The role of the teacher

Section 22 (1) of the Education Act states the primacy and responsibility of the teacher in the education and personal development of students in schools. This requires targeted interventions to develop relevant skills related to these needs and to facilitate the meaningful inclusion of students with special educational needs.



Collaboration between the teacher and SNA is important in terms of providing guidance and direction to ensure the SNA is effectively supporting the student(s) to elicit the best outcomes for them.

5.1 Role of the class or subject teacher

The class or subject teacher has primary responsibility for the education, progress and care of all students in their classroom, including those with special educational needs. The SNA provides support to students under the direction of the teacher.

The teacher:

- Has a central role in identifying and responding to students' special educational needs.
- Adapts their teaching, learning and assessment approaches for students with special educational needs.
- Shall be informed and assisted by the student support plan and by collaboration, where appropriate, with SNAs, other relevant teachers and school staff, parents, the student and other relevant professionals such as therapists, educational psychologists and the NCSE where applicable.
- Considers ways in which the curriculum can be adapted to meet the needs of the student and develop their full potential. This may also involve identifying the most appropriate strategies, approaches and evidence-informed interventions to meet the students' needs.

5.2 Role of the special education teacher

The special education teacher provides additional teaching to students attending mainstream classes with special educational needs and should lead, model and ensure a high standard of provision.

Special education teachers use a wide range of teaching approaches in collaboration with the teacher(s) to meet a variety of student needs. This ensures that students with special educational needs in mainstream education are supported on their educational journey.



Special education teachers are responsible for the development, implementation and review of student support plans for students that they are involved in providing direct additional teaching support for.

Collaboration between the special education teacher, teacher, SNA, parent(s) and students themselves is a key principle in ensuring high quality provision to meet the needs of students.

6 Communication and collaboration

To provide the best outcome for the student, in the context of their distinct roles, it is essential that the SNA, teacher(s) and relevant members of the whole-school community collaborate and plan together and this should include the voice of the student. Such collaboration and planning is essential to promote student wellbeing and to achieve targets set in the student support plan, to ensure that students' progress in learning and developing independence to reach their potential.

Inclusion is most effective when SNAs and teachers plan and work together, ensuring their roles complement each other. In this regard, the SNA and teacher shall regularly collaborate to enable the SNA to effectively support students' inclusion and engagement in their learning in each lesson and classroom. This approach to active collaboration between the adults in the classroom has the potential to contribute to the teacher providing broader learning opportunities for all students in the class.

The SNA shall communicate and collaborate with the teacher(s), the special education teacher(s) and the principal, and attend meetings with parents, NCSE, National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and other agencies, and school staff meetings, as required, under the direction of the principal or delegate.

The SNA shall communicate with parent(s) in relation to student concerns or care progress, as agreed with the principal or teacher and in line with school policy.



All SNA communication and sharing of information in relation to student(s) and school matters, shall take into account the requirement for confidentiality.

SNAs shall comply with all school policies including in relation to data protection, child protection and the acceptable use of phones, laptops or other devices.

7 SNA duties and responsibilities

The board has a responsibility to provide for the education, care and wellbeing of all students who attend the school, including students with special educational needs.

It should not be assumed that all students who have special educational needs require access to SNA support. It should also not be assumed that the allocation of additional SNA support is a requirement for a student with special educational needs to attend school.

SNA duties and responsibilities shall be assigned by the principal, or their delegate, or the board, in accordance with the Education Act 1998, other relevant legislation, this circular, department policy and NCSE guidance.

The type of significant or core care needs that students may have can be varied, depending on the nature or level of the medical condition, disability or sensory needs that a student may have. Given the variety of medical conditions that students may present with, it is not possible to list all the associated care needs in this circular. However, some examples of the core care needs considered as significant – and which may require SNA support are set out in point 8.1 below.

7.1 Core care needs

The primary role of the SNA is to meet the core care needs for students with special educational needs, as directed by the principal or delegate. Providing support to meet core care needs shall be a priority role for all SNAs. The following table sets out an indicative list of core care needs and associated duties on which SNA allocations to schools are based (this is not an exhaustive list).



Core care needs	
Care Need	SNA Duties
Feeding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feeding a student who cannot physically feed themselves.• Peg or tube feeding.• Encouraging self-feeding in line with recommendations and any clinician guidelines provided to the school.• Supervising a student who has a Feeding Eating Drinking Swallowing (FEDS) care plan owing to a risk of choking/aspiration.
Toileting and general hygiene	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encouraging and supporting a student who cannot independently self-toilet.• Caring for students who are incontinent (wearing nappies or other continence wear).• Changing clothes/attending to personal hygiene after toileting 'accidents' in conjunction with student's toileting programme.• Escorting a young or vulnerable student to the toilet, where necessary.
Caring for a Student with a Catheter	<p>SNAs provide vital support to students in managing their urinary catheters. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Managing clean intermittent catheterisation (CIC).• Inserting/removing catheter where student cannot self-catheterise.• Emptying catheter bags.• Ensuring the bag remains safe.• Maintaining student hygiene to prevent infection.
Mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assisting a student whose mobility is compromised including where the student require a wheelchair, walker or other aid.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Operating hoists or other equipment where a student requires assistance with moving or lifting, in line with appropriate training and direction.• Assisting a student where such support is required as directed by principal or delegate, including assisting students who are blind/vision impaired with mobility throughout the school day as required.
Medical Care Needs (non-nursing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supporting significant care needs associated with specific medical or health conditions, as detailed in the student support plan and subject to provision of appropriate training.• Assisting a student where adult assistance is required to administer medicine.
Support for students who are blind/vision/sensory impaired (BVISI) or deaf/hard of hearing (DHH).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supporting access to the curriculum both in class and through the preparation of materials for students who are BVISI or DHH.• Supporting students using assistive technology equipment to access the curriculum.• Working with students to facilitate their communication with staff members and their peers in the school community and ensuring access to all appropriate areas of the school.
Regulation and Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support students at a time of dysregulation or when engaging in a behaviour of concern under the direction of the teacher/special education teacher or principal.
Communication	<p>Under the direction of the teacher:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supporting non-speaking and minimally-speaking students to express themselves using their preferred communication methods, such as sign language, gestures, or augmentative and alternative communication (AAC).



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Providing communication support tailored to students with complex and profound needs.
Assist with supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assisting teachers with supervision during recreation time, assembly and dispersal times (arriving and departing school) as directed by the principal or delegate.• Assisting with supervision on a temporary basis, in exceptional circumstances where there are legitimate reasons that existing teaching resources cannot facilitate such supervision during that period.

7.2 Support for regulation

Schools are required to develop and implement well-coordinated, effective whole-school approaches to supporting students. Under section 23 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, the board of each school must prepare and make available a code of behaviour for its students to create and maintain a safe, positive learning environment for the whole school community.

Teachers have responsibility for the overall progress of their students, including those who become dysregulated and display behaviours of concern.

What are referred to as behaviours of concern are usually signs that the student has become dysregulated. Dysregulation occurs when a student's stress level becomes too much for them to manage. Some of these stressors affecting students may be internal, for instance a physical feeling (for example hunger) or an emotional feeling (for example frustration) or there could be external stressors happening around a person or to a person (for example a noisy room).

All behaviour and regulation support needs should be planned for collaboratively in the SSP to implement proactive and universal supports. The student and their parents will provide insight into what is regulating for them.



The supports developed to meet identified needs relating to behaviours of concern should be set out in the student's SSP and regularly reviewed and amended as necessary over time.

Supports and strategies should be shared with the relevant SNA as early as possible including any other relevant information about the student, as set out in the SSP. For example, SNAs should be made aware of early signs of dysregulation which could escalate into behaviours of concern and will be guided on what action to take as set out in the SSP.

Regulation should take place in the class as a whole class approach, as opportunities for regulation can be beneficial for all students.

In certain circumstances, the SNA, under the direction of the teacher, may provide additional regulation support to some students maintain regulation in line with the student's needs as outlined in their SSP.

Following this support measure, the school should then use the Phases of Support template from NCSE Relate to proactively plan for the student's regulation. It is important that regulation activities are informed by the identification of stressors and what is required to support the student to return to a calm, regulated state.

Reflecting on what stressors may have led to the student's dysregulation is crucial and should be recorded to inform proactive planning.

SNA support can include the implementation of regulation breaks, under the direction of the teacher.

While SNAs have a role in supporting aspects of student behaviour, it should not be assumed that all students who display behaviours of concern require access to SNA support or that SNA support is the appropriate intervention. SNA support should not be considered as a first response when developing strategies for management of



behaviour for students, but only as part of a whole-school response to meeting the student's needs.

The NCSE determines a school's SNA allocation to meet the core care needs of all students in line with the Continuum of Support (the continuum). In making this determination the NCSE adopts a holistic appraisal of SNA duties as they relate to school life and in line with the continuum.

7.3 Supporting communication needs

Communication is an interdependent process. All school staff should adapt how they communicate to match the student's preferred way of communicating, so both the student and staff can work together effectively.

All school staff, including SNAs should promote social communication by modelling or demonstrating while engaging students, creating inclusive opportunities and supporting peer to peer connections, taking account of the social and communication preferences of the student being supported.

Communication difficulties are a known stressors which can contribute to dysregulation for the student. School staff, including SNAs, should proactively ensure that communication is planned for in collaboration with the student and their family. Consistency in agreed communication approaches should be maintained throughout the school day.

8 Student support duties

On completion of core care duties, SNAs can carry out other appropriate student support duties which are listed below:

- 1. Support for learning**
- 2. Therapy supports**
- 3. Transitions**
- 4. Other student support duties**



These duties, which are detailed below, will not qualify the school for additional SNA posts.

8.1 Support for learning

The teacher holds the primary responsibility for the learning and personal development of all students in the class, including those with special educational needs. The special education teacher is responsible for providing additional teaching to students attending mainstream classes with special educational needs. Special education teachers use a wide range of teaching approaches to meet a variety of student needs.

Where the core care needs of students have been provided for, the SNA can support students' access to, engagement and participation in learning, as detailed below.

SNA support for access to, engagement and participation in learning is always designed by and delivered under the supervision of the teacher.

SNAs do not have a teaching/pedagogical role. The SNA role in support for learning does not include teaching new concepts, skills or knowledge to students.

The SNA role in support for access to, engagement and participation in learning may include:

- Helping to remove barriers to students' access to the curriculum.
- Supporting the student to generalise skills being developed, by reinforcing student learning using approaches directed by the teacher. This may include, for example, modelling and supporting communication through the use of Lámh or AAC. It may also include other skills outlined in the student's SSP such as personal hygiene.
- Assisting to prepare the student's learning environment to support effective learning.



- Implementing both whole class and individual visual supports and schedules as directed by the teacher. Visual schedules help show the student what is happening and when it will happen, thus providing a predictable routine that can support regulation and promote independence.
- Supporting the student with independent living and functional life skills, behaviour and social and emotional wellbeing.
- Helping students to participate in their learning and to stay on task, where needed. This is under the direction of the teacher and always with the aim of supporting the student to develop the skills necessary to become independent in his/her learning. This support may continue depending on the students' emerging needs or gradually withdraw as the student becomes more independent and makes progress.
- Supporting inclusive participation – assisting students in accessing whole-class and whole-school activities and routines. This may include support for students during lessons by clarifying tasks, prompting, reinforcing instructions, and maintaining attention.
- Supporting the teacher with a student's regulation and readiness to learn - this must be based on identified needs and can involve:
 - Assisting students to understand and engage with the task set by the teacher. This should take precedence over task completion which can hinder deeper learning and independence.
 - Supporting the whole class, promoting inclusive practices alongside their support of students with core care needs.

8.2 Therapy supports

It is not appropriate for an SNA to be responsible for the management of, or provision of therapy services to students.

Therapeutic interventions such as speech and language, occupational and physiotherapy are provided in school by relevant professionals to students who require such interventions.



SNA shall assist students to access therapy support in schools or assist a therapist in providing support to a student or assist the student to perform therapy tasks, as directed by a qualified therapist or under the direction of the teacher, as set out in the SSP or relevant report as appropriate.

The requirement for delivery of therapies will not warrant the allocation of an SNA post, nor can the provision of SNA support compensate for a lack of therapy provision by qualified therapeutic personnel.

8.3 Supporting transitions

During their primary and post-primary education students may require SNA support with transitions. Effective planning and implementation around transitions will provide structure, enhance understanding, and reduce anxiety for the student.

All transitions shall be planned and implemented under the direction and assistance of the principal or delegate.

SNA shall assist with transition processes for students they are assigned to support, as directed by the principal or delegate or the board, before and after school, between school transport and school buildings, in school or between school settings, as required.

The student's voice, as appropriate and in so far as possible, should be central to all decisions around transitions that they will be undertaking, to ensure they are as successful and seamless as possible for the student concerned.

Transitions requiring SNA support may include:

- The student's arrival in school in the mornings or departure in afternoon.
- Moving from school transport to school building and vice versa.
- Moving from special class to mainstream class.
- In post-primary setting moving from one subject class to another.



- Transitions from one activity to another. This includes the preparation and arrangement of workspaces and classrooms or assisting a student who is not physically able to perform such tasks.
- Transitioning to the support of another SNA.
- Changes in preplanned activities.

Other transitions may require longer-term planning, consideration and collaboration including transitions:

- From pre-school/early intervention class to primary school.
- From primary school to post-primary school.
- From post-primary school to further or higher education/training, adult placement or workplace environment.
- To support work placements/work experience at post-primary level.

Transitions may include the following SNA duties:

- Collaborating and planning for transitions with the principal or delegate.
- Collaborating and planning for transitions between schools/school sectors with another principal or delegate.
- Using strategies such as schedules and communication aids, as agreed.
- Creating a visual schedule based on teacher assessment of the appropriate visual schedule to be used.
- Supporting the student to engage with and follow the schedule for times of transition.
- Visiting a new educational setting with students with special educational needs to meet with staff and become familiar with the new setting.

8.4 Other student support duties

The SNA shall, where required and as directed by the principal or delegate carry out student support duties assigned by the board or principal or delegate to support the student(s) including the following duties (the following indicative list of student support duties is not an exhaustive list):



- Encouraging peer interaction thereby fostering social inclusion and avoiding isolation. This helps the student to develop positive relationships with their peers.
- Contributing to student support planning and the review process, where appropriate, including participating in student support planning meetings, helping to implement relevant aspects of the student support plans, and seeking the views of students around the supports they require.
- Assisting students for whom they are allocated or assigned to by the principal or delegate to participate in art, drama and other practical subjects or activities including activities on the PE and wellbeing curriculum, swimming and other sporting activities or events.
- Contributing to observations of student progress for relevant school reports, files, journals, as requested.
- Assisting the teacher or principal to plan, prepare and update files/records for students who receive SNA support.
- Participating in school planning and policy development and in whole-school staff meetings, where appropriate.
- Engaging with teachers/principal where there may be additional care or assistance requirements for certain classes or projects to enable students to participate in line with their abilities.

8.5 Dignity of the student

All school staff, including SNAs shall, in line with the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), recognise that every child and young person who has the capacity to form a view has the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them and to have due weight given to their views, in accordance with their age and maturity.

It is important that students with special educational needs are consulted on the support provided to them in a manner that is appropriate to their age and needs.



SNA support and care shall be student-centred, promote the student's safety and welfare, and provide appropriate support to ensure the student's dignity is upheld and that they can as far as possible participate fully in education and school life.

All decisions made in respect of a student shall be underpinned by what is in the student's best interests and take account of their learning and development strengths, interests and needs.

Accordingly, SNAs shall, as appropriate:

- Communicate with students in a respectful and age-appropriate manner.
- Actively seek input from students in relation to decisions about their care and support.
- Treat all personal information about the student as private and confidential in line with the school's data protection, child protection and other related policies.
- In collaboration with the principal/teacher/special educational needs team, plan to meet each student's individual needs by prioritising wellbeing, promoting strengths and recognising areas of difficulty.
- Encourage and empower students by supporting them to take on manageable tasks to build confidence and self-esteem.
- Take an approach that balances the combined perspectives of support and inclusion.
- Facilitate student interaction and collaboration with peers.

9 School community time (SCT)

School Community Time (SCT) is time allocated for essential SNA duties which cannot, ordinarily, be carried out during school hours. This time is essential to complete important work around planning, reviewing and collaboration with colleagues to take place without impacting on the time spent supporting students during the school day. The SCT time should be used to carry out these and other tasks appropriate to the SNA role that cannot be completed during normal school hours.



SCT is a requirement of the SNA role as set out in the SNA employment contract (circulars 39/2026 & 40/2026). In accordance with this requirement SNAs shall complete an additional number of hours per year outside of normal class hours, as set out in their employment contract. This requirement does not apply to SNAs who are paid an hourly rate.

School Community Time can be divided into two overall categories:

1. Student Support planning and review.
2. School policy and planning.

The lists below are provided as a guide for schools on the types of planning and work that may be recorded as relating to SCT. This is not an exhaustive list, however, any additional tasks under these categories to be recorded as school community time must be appropriate to the SNA role and duties as set out in this circular.

9.1 Student support planning and review

It is essential that all relevant school staff working with a student are involved in the planning and review process for that student. This will ensure that there are no gaps in information, that appropriate goals are set and that each student's specific needs are met during the school year. A minimum of 10 hours should be allocated to this time for SNAs each school year.

This includes time allocated to:

- a) Initial meetings at the start of each school year to collaborate with the special educational needs team on the Student Support Plan.
- b) Collaboration with the special educational needs team to review the Student Support Plan and the student's progress during the school year.
- c) Attendance at multi-disciplinary meetings, as required.
- d) Parent/teacher meetings, where the input of SNAs is required for discussions and direct engagement with parents on the progress of students receiving SNA supports.



9.2 Policy planning/whole school collaboration

A maximum of 10 hours should be allocated to this time each school year:

- (a) Collaboration and/or consultation within the school community, where relevant, on policy development or other school related matters.
- (b) Attending relevant school staff meetings.

9.3 Other considerations

- All SNAs in standard posts who complete appropriate tasks or duties or engage in school related collaboration or activities associated with their role outside of school classroom hours shall record these hours as school community time.
- Duties carried out and recorded as SCT must be appropriate to the role of the SNA.
- The SCT cannot be used for periods that SNAs are already required to work before and after school such as the times allocated to preparation and arrangement of classrooms or reception and dispersal of students, as outlined in the working hours provision of the SNA employment contract.
- SNAs must record SCT time completed and note whether the tasks completed relate to policy planning/student support planning and review or other.

10 Learning and development

Ongoing learning and development are essential for SNAs to effectively meet the diverse and complex needs of students with special educational needs. It will ensure SNA support aligns with best practice, is effective and safe, promotes inclusion, fosters independence and provides the best possible support to the students they work with.

10.1 Training/upskilling requirements

SNAs shall complete:

- Mandatory training as directed by the principal or delegate, board, the department or its agencies or any other Government department.
- Such training as the principal or delegate deems necessary or appropriate to carry out their role effectively.



- Training provided for by the department, NCSE or another appropriate provider, as directed to schools.

SNA's may complete other training as agreed in advance with the school principal, including:

- Appropriate training courses at regional education support centres (ESCs).
- Department funded SNA National Training Programme.
- Training scheduled outside class time to mentor newly appointed SNA(s).

Schools should ensure that SNA's who work with those students who are deaf/hard of hearing or blind/vision impaired are equipped with the skills necessary to support the particular needs of these students, including the capacity to use Sign Language where required.

Where existing SNA staff are required to be trained to provide Irish Sign Language (ISL) or specialist training (Braille, Lámh) to assist in the provision of support for students with specific sensory or communication needs, schools should ensure that the most senior SNA staff in the school are offered the training in the first instance in order to retain appropriate levels of expertise in the school.

10.2 Learning and development time

Learning and development time is time specifically allocated for essential SNA training, development and upskilling. This must be completed outside of normal classroom hours, to ensure that the SNA will be available to provide necessary support to students.

A **minimum of 10 hours** dedicated to learning and development must be completed by SNA's (up to a maximum of 36 hours) per school year which should be used as a flexible bank of learning and development time.

Training/learning/upskilling appropriate to the role may include:

- (a) Formal induction/retirement training.



- (b) Training for further professional development relevant to the SNA role and duties.
- (c) Specific and relevant training based on student needs within the school. This may be dependent on SNA experience and individual student specific need.
- (d) Wellbeing and mindfulness training related to the SNA role.
- (e) Communities of Practice where SNAs can meet to share knowledge, experiences, and perspectives and mutually benefit from each other's expertise and insights.
- (f) Completing the SNA National Training Programme (up to a maximum of 20 hours).

Learning and Development Time:

- May include self-directed learning.
- Must be appropriate and relevant to the SNA role.
- Must be agreed in advance with the school management.
- Includes training mandated by the department/NCSE/board of management/ETB where such training takes place outside of classroom hours.
- Relevant to the SNA role and approved by the board/ETB, or the principal will be funded by the school, the department or the NCSE, as appropriate.

10.3 Recording training:

SNA training must be recorded. At the end of each term or school year a form will be submitted by the SNA noting the total hours of training completed that term/year (template form available as appendix to the guidance document accompanying this circular). This form should be maintained by the school on the SNA's file in the school and available for inspection by the department, where required.

11 Post-primary sector school year

SNAs in the post-primary sector are required to work the month of June on examinations and work appropriate to the SNA role, including training.

Classroom hours do not generally carry on through the month of June in post-primary schools. Therefore, the school day in June is viewed as different to the rest



of the year, and attendance should primarily be determined by the principal in relation to the work to be undertaken. In this regard, schools should note that only appropriate work should be assigned, in line with the provisions of this circular. Duties should be assigned to SNAs in a fair and equitable manner, as early as possible, so that SNAs have sufficient clarity and notice in advance.

Training undertaken by SNAs, during the month of June, may take place outside of school premises in an ESC or other approved location or at home, where appropriate and by prior agreement with the principal. Schools should ensure compliance with the school's data protection policy and other relevant governance policies.

Schools can consider the appropriateness and suitability of any such arrangement when planning relevant training, and decisions in this regard are ultimately a matter for each school principal. Confirmation of attendance through a certificate of completion, award or equivalent must be submitted by the SNA to the school.

12 Extra-curricular activities

It is important that students with special educational needs are supported to fully participate in school life including extracurricular activities where SNA support is required..

The SNA role is essential to student involvement in these activities facilitating inclusion and self-development of students with special educational needs. It is recognised that these duties are undertaken outside of normal working hours, on a goodwill, voluntary basis. Therefore, activities within this category are to be undertaken following discussion and agreement between the principal and the SNA(s).

Extracurricular activities often include the participation of students receiving SNA support in non-academic or academic activities and clubs. SNAs may also on occasions where they are requested and agree in advance, attend school open



days/evenings or other whole school events alongside other school staff and students.

13 Examination duties

The SNA shall assist, as required, in supporting students during examination periods and in setting up Special Examination Centres for both state and school exams.

Duties may include:

- (a) Assist students with special educational needs during examinations by ensuring they continue to have SNA support as well as support to set up special exam centres and equipment in preparation for exams.
- (b) Assist in the setting up of Special Examination Centres and appropriate accommodation centres for examinations. Where rooms are adapted for use as special centres, assist in restoring those rooms for normal school use after the examinations have finished.
- (c) Supervisor, scribe or reader. These positions are filled and paid for by the school who are reimbursed by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) in line with the provisions set out in their annual Reasonable Accommodations at Certificate Examinations (RACE) circular.

14 Allocation and deployment of SNAs

The NCSE is responsible for planning, allocating and coordinating school support for students with special educational needs.

SNAs are allocated to mainstream schools by the NCSE based on the overall profile of core care needs of the school. SNAs are not allocated to an individual student, with the exception of SNAs who are individually allocated by the NCSE to students with Irish Sign Language (ISL) support requirements. SNAs are allocated to special classes and special schools by the NCSE, based on student-to-class ratios.



The NCSE publishes SNA allocations to schools in advance of each school year. For ease of reference, these allocations are broken down by school type and are available on the [NCSE website](#).

The responsibility for deployment of SNAs within schools is a matter for the principal or delegate and the board in line with the most recent department policy and NCSE guidance in this regard.

It is important to note that SNAs can be deployed between special classes and mainstream classes based on the needs of students at any given time.

SNAs must be deployed on the basis that the students with the greatest level of core care needs receive the highest level of core care support. The deployment of SNAs should be flexible and responsive to students' individual core care needs while ensuring the correct amount of support is delivered based upon current care needs.

The role and duties of the SNA and the intended purpose of SNA support, as set out in this circular and the associated guidelines, should be communicated to parents by the school when discussing the provision of SNA support to students in the school.

15 Conclusion

Please ensure that this circular and supporting guidance document is brought to the attention of all school staff.

All boards and SNAs employed in recognised schools must adhere to the agreed terms and conditions as outlined in this circular from the commencement of the 2026/27 academic year.

Any queries on the provisions of this circular should be sent to snaworkforcedevelopment@education.gov.ie



This circular can be accessed on the department website at www.gov.ie.

Angela Corcoran,

Principal Officer

**SNA Workforce Development Unit
Department of Education and Youth**

3 June 2026



Appendix 1 - Associated documents

Document:	Published by:
Special Educational Needs A Continuum of Support - Guidelines for teachers - Primary Schools	NEPS
Special Educational Needs A Continuum of Support for Post Primary Schools - Guidelines for Teachers	NEPS
NCSE Relate – A Regulation-First Approach to Reframing Behaviour and Supporting Student Engagement and Participation	NCSE
Understanding Behaviours of Concern and Responding to Crisis Situations	Department
Autism Good Practice Guidance for Schools	Department
SNA Toolkit – Deployment of SNA Support	NCSE
Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice	NEPS
Supporting Children with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Classes – Guidelines for Primary Schools	Department
Supporting Children with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Classes – Guidelines for Post-primary Schools	Department
The Education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children in Ireland	NCSE
NCSE-Movement-Breaks-in-the-Classroom-Booklet.pdf	NCSE
Moving-from-Primary-to-PostPrimary-School.pdf	NCSE
Special Needs Assistants Allocations circular, updated annually, current version available on this page - Recruitment & Appointment of SNAs	Department