

Parents Associations of Community and Comprehensive Schools



Special Needs Booklet

You can teach a student a lesson for a day; but if you can teach him to learn by creating curiosity, he will continue the learning process as long as he lives.

-- Clay P. Bedford

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1. Introduction

What is the function of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE)?

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) was set up to improve the delivery of education services to persons with special educational needs arising from disabilities with particular emphasis on children. The NCSE is responsible through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers for allocating resource hours and special needs assistants to support children with special needs.

What is a Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO)?

SENOs are appointed by the NCSE to provide a direct local service to the parents of children with special educational needs and to schools within geographical areas. This involves identifying the needs of children and deciding on the level of resources schools require to provide them with an appropriate education service. A SENO deals with applications for additional teaching and Special Needs Assistant support for children with special educational needs from all schools. The SENO also assists with applications for transport and Assistive Technology. A SENO can advise schools and parents on the facilities, services, and resources available to assist children with Special Educational Needs.

What is a Special Needs Assistants (SNA)?

Special Needs Assistants (SNA) help teachers in schools, by providing classroom support to pupils with a wide range of severe learning, physical or behavioural difficulties. Assistants may work in a special school or in mainstream schools. In general terms the SNA acts in a care and support role that is non-teaching in nature and works under the guidance and supervision of the Principal and/or class teacher, helping pupils to achieve their learning goals. Other duties

depend on the assistant's particular job, the type and severity of the pupils' disabilities and their age but may include:

- Helping pupils to improve their independent living skills
- Supporting pupils in social activities and outings
- Assisting pupils during therapy sessions
- Attending to pupils' physical needs

The role and duties of the SNA are more clearly defined in DES Circular 10/76 and Circular 07/02.

What are assessment tests?

Assessment tests can assist the teacher in identifying areas of learning difficulty, in measuring and recording attainment, in measuring pupil progress and in indicating intervention measures. Assessment can be formative or summative and can be for screening or diagnostic purposes. Tests should be used judiciously as their interpretation may require professional special needs insight

What is Reasonable Accommodation?

Accommodations or Reasonable Accommodations in the state examinations of junior certificate and leaving certificate refers to modifications in how the test is administered while not compromising the integrity of the examination system. Accommodations may include changes to presentation format, response format, test setting or test timing. In general terms, the provision aims to remove the impact of a disability so that candidates can demonstrate their full level of attainment, while not given any advantage.

2. How Special Needs are assigned at Second Level

Case 1

Entrance exam is held and the results are used as an indication of the child's ability. If a child performs at below average further information is sought from the child's parents and their primary school. If the child has performed well up to this and has not required help then it may be assumed that the child had a bad day on the date of the exam and will be okay without help. However the progress of the child will be monitored and the need for support will be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Case 2

The child is identified at primary school as having special needs and resources were assigned. A current educational psychological report is given to the second level school approximately six months before the child is due to start. School forwards report to the local Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO) requesting resources. SENO reviews the report and assigns resources to the child based on specific criteria.

Case 3

During the school year it becomes apparent that a child is having difficulty with a particular subject or group of subjects or some behavioural problem.

Child is assessed and supported with available resources. Support/resource teacher can request the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) carry out an educational psychological assessment of the child (with the parents' permission) School forwards the report of the assessment to

the SENO requesting additional resources. SENO assigns resources based on specific criteria.

Note: *Parents have the right to choose the school that their child attends. All schools regardless of sector can apply for resources for special needs students. Resources are assigned to the child not the school.*

Learner Supports Available at Second Level

Type Of Teacher	Job Description	How they are assigned	How Long
Learning Support Teacher	Works with children on a one to one or group basis to address identified short term need i.e. help with reading, maths etc.	School or parent identifies need	Short term with a view to remediation
Resource Teacher	Works with an individual or group who have a specific learning or behavioural difficulty i.e. dyslexia, ADHD, visually impaired. This position involves not just class work but also looking out for the students wellbeing within the wider school environment.	Based on NEPS report SENO assigns hours to the school on behalf of the child.	Long Term
Special Needs Assistant	Works with an individual within the classroom and the wider school environment to help them with school activities	Based on NEPS report SENO assigns hours to a particular child	Long Term

3. Getting an Educational Psychologist's Report

The school can request that NEPS carry out an Educational Psychologist's assessment on your child. The Psychologist's will come to the school on a pre-arranged day and carry out a number of tests on your child. A parent's consent is needed before this assessment can be carried out. The cost of a NEPS assessment is covered by the Department of Education and Science (DES)

There is however usually a long waiting list for a NEPS assessment. Schools only have a set number of cases which they can refer to NEPS for any given year. The school will prioritise these assessments and your child may not be a high enough priority. It is also possible to get an Educational Psychologist's assessment privately (typically costs €500-600). There is a long waiting list for private assessments

4. Examination Support

House Exams

For school exams the school decides what help if any a child will get. The school will try identifying what kind of help will best suit the student's needs.

Reasonable Accommodation

Reasonable Accommodations are available to students when sitting state exams. Arrangements may include the provision of a reader or scribe, use of a word processor or a tape recorder, a spelling waiver, exemptions from examination components, braille translations and exams papers in large print. The accommodations are intended to limit the impact of

the candidates' disability on their exam performance, while not giving the candidate any unfair advantage.

Junior Certificate

The school applies to the DES for "*Reasonable Accommodations*" for the student. The request must be made by November of the exam year. Response by March/April. The school can apply for these based on the educational history of the child. There is no requirement for a current educational psychologists report. "*Reasonable Accommodations*" at junior cert is usually granted if requested.

Leaving Certificate

The school applies to the DES for "*Reasonable Accommodations*" for the student. The request must be made by the end of May of the year previous to the exam year. Requests are typically responded to by March/April of the exam year. Requests for "*Reasonable Accommodations*" can be accompanied by current educational psychologists report - although this is not a prerequisite. All requests will be reviewed by NEPS before a decision will be made. Students requesting accommodations at leaving cert may be requested to attend an interview with a NEPS psychologist's. Each request is considered on its own merits.

5. Exemption from Irish

Children may be exempted from studying Irish if their reading and spelling levels in English are in the bottom 10% of their age group. To secure an exemption, parents must make a written request to the School Principal and must provide a copy of an assessment report from a Psychologist. This report must be less than two years old and the Psychologist must recommend the granting of an exemption. If the Department of Education grant the exemption, then a certificate is given. If the student has received an exemption from Irish at primary level the exemption is accepted at second level. A copy of the “Certificate of Exemption” will be requested by the second level school before the student is excused from Irish classes.

6. Important Information for Parents of Children with Special Needs

1. Resources that have been assigned to a child at primary school do not automatically move with the child to second level school. A current (less than two years old) educational psychologist's report is needed by the school to apply for extra help to meet your child's needs and must be sent to the school at least 6 months prior to the child's start date at second level.
2. A report with recommendations from an educational psychologist, regardless of it being prepared by a NEPS or private psychologist, does not entitle a child to additional help at second level. The report simply acts as a recommendation that such assistance is required, at this time the Department of Education and Science (DES) is not obliged to provide extra teachers to meet these special needs.
3. If DES does not provide extra resources it is at the discretion of individual schools to decide what help they can and will give to each child.
4. Parents need to be aware that they may need to fight for any additional help that their children may need in second level.
5. An educational psychologist's report is not needed to apply for "*reasonable accommodation*" for Junior Certificate examinations. Second Level schools can now apply for *reasonable accommodation* using the

child's educational history as evidence of the need. There is no requirement for an educational psychologist report and such a report does not automatically result in any special entitlements.

6. Where an accommodation is approved for Junior Certificate, it does not automatically follow that approval will be granted for Leaving Certificate. A fresh application will be required in respect of the Leaving Certificate and each will be considered on its own merits. Application is made through the school with the parents/guardians permission. An up-to-date (less than two years old) psychological report is not a prerequisite but should be included if available. All requests will be reviewed by NEPS, who may look for further information and will request to meet the student, before a decision will be made. Statistics over the last few years do show that fewer numbers of considerations are given at Leaving Certificate.
7. When "*reasonable accommodation*" has been granted an asterisk will appear next to the subject on the student's Junior or leaving certificate results. A supplementary report will be included on the back of the certificate explaining what help the student received.
8. If the student has received an exemption from Irish at primary level the exemption is accepted at second level and the student will be excused from having to study Irish. A copy of the "*Certificate of Exemption*"

will be requested by the second level school before the student is excused from Irish classes.

9. If a student wants support at third level they must answer yes to the question asking if the applicant has a disability/specific learning disability, on the first page of the CAO form. They will then be sent a Supplementary Information Form to complete and send back to the CAO by March. An educational psychologist's full report written within the last three years confirming a specific learning difficulty must be included when returning this form.

7. Assessment for Learning and Pupils with Special Educational Needs

The aim of this paper is to provide a summary of the key issues in relation to the application of the concept of Assessment *for* Learning to pupils with special educational needs (SEN).

Although some tools may be the same (e.g. questioning) the key issues emerging from the feedback provided by Project Experts indicated that it is necessary to keep in mind that:

- Assessment *for* Learning aims at improving learning;
- Assessment *of* Learning aims at ensuring accountability (of schools and teachers).
- Assessment *for* Learning explores the potential for learning and indicates the next step to be taken in order to promote learning and focuses upon the dynamics of teaching and learning);
- Assessment *of* Learning shows what has been already achieved, memorised and absorbed and provides a snapshot of the current situation.
- Assessment *for* Learning within this research-based context involves issues of self-reflection and self-assessment that develops a pupils' own understanding of how learning is taking place and how it can be developed. This is particularly relevant as Assessment *for* Learning emphasises assessment as a process of meta-cognition (see for example the notion of Assessment *as* Learning in Western and Northern Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Education,

2006). These notions, however, are not always the main focus when the concept of Assessment for Learning is used more generally.

Assessment for Learning – a relevant concept

The most main outcome emerging from the discussions of the Project Experts is the agreement that

“Assessment for Learning is a significant element in successful teaching and learning of teaching with all pupils, including those with SEN”.

In essence, the critical question to ask is not whether Assessment for Learning can be applied to pupils with special educational needs, but rather how it can be applied.

However, one potential area of concern was highlighted by project experts in relation to using Assessment for Learning with pupils with the most severe needs.

In particular, engaging pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties in the ‘feedback loop’ was seen as being challenging.

However, project experts’ reflections on this potential difficulty can be summed up as follows:

... “students with profound difficulties do not need different assessment systems, but only different methods/tools of assessment”.

Assessment for Learning – methods and tools

In relation to tools for Assessment for Learning, Project Experts’ feedback indicates that many Assessments for Learning approaches (such as individualised observation, portfolios and diaries) have been extensively used in special needs education settings for some considerable time. In

relation to other potential methods and tools it is necessary to underline the fact that Assessment *for* Learning methods and tools can be used with pupils with SEN providing that they are modified and adjusted (accommodated) to meet the needs of the individual pupil.

Building on this assertion

Four main findings can be highlighted:

1. The same principles of Assessment *for* Learning apply to pupils with or without SEN.
2. The only difference in Assessment *for* Learning between pupils with and without special educational needs is essentially in the type of tools and the assessment/ communication methods used by teachers.
3. The only area of concern relating to Assessment *for* Learning being applied to pupils with SEN relates to the notion of Assessment *for* Learning as a tool for pupils' reflection on their own learning (i.e. the interaction between the pupil and teacher during the 'feedback loop'). For pupils who use alternative forms of communication this feedback process cannot operate in the 'traditional' language based way. In this case, a more individualised approach, new assessment tools and a variety of means for teacher/pupil interaction need to be explored and implemented; for example close observation in structured situations which allows teachers to assess pupils' likes/dislikes and so forth.

4. Many methods and tools of Assessment *for* Learning have been developed within special needs education settings and could be transferred into mainstream settings to improve educational provision for all pupils.

In summary, Assessment *for* Learning can and should be applied to all pupils, including those with SEN, providing that the relevant and necessary changes and modifications are made in order to ensure the individual pupil's full participation in the assessment process.

8. Inclusive Assessment

“An approach to assessment in mainstream settings where policy and practice are designed to promote the learning of all pupils as far as possible. The overall goal of inclusive assessment is that all assessment policies and procedures should support and enhance the successful inclusion and participation of all pupils vulnerable to exclusion, including those with SEN”.

The Principles of Inclusive Assessment

Inclusive assessment explicitly **aims to prevent segregation** by avoiding (as far as possible) forms of labelling and by **focussing on learning and teaching practice that promotes inclusion** in a mainstream setting.

Inclusive assessment can only be realised within an **appropriate policy framework** and with **the appropriate organisation of schools and support to teachers** who themselves have a positive attitude towards inclusion.

This means that:

- The needs of pupils vulnerable to exclusion, including those with SEN, are considered and accounted for within all general as well as SEN specific assessment policies;
- All pupils are entitled to be part of inclusive assessment procedures: those with SEN as well as their classmates and peers;
- All assessment methods and approaches are complementary and inform each other;
- Assessment aims to ‘celebrate’ diversity by identifying and valuing all pupils’ progress and achievements.

The Focus of Inclusive Assessment

The purpose of inclusive assessment is to **improve learning for all pupils in mainstream settings**. All inclusive assessment procedures, methods and tools **inform teaching and learning and support teachers** in their work.

Inclusive assessment aims to be **empowering for the pupil** concerned by providing them with **insights into their own learning** as well as a source of motivation to encourage their future learning.

Inclusive assessment involves:

- A range of methods and strategies that all aim to gather clear evidence about pupils' learning in non-academic as well as academic subjects;
- Procedures that may fulfil other purposes in addition to informing teaching and learning (for example initial identification of SEN, or monitoring of educational standards), but that are based upon shared concepts and values for assessment and inclusion as well as the principles of participation and collaboration;
- Methods that report on the outcomes of learning, but also provide teachers with information on how to develop and improve the process of learning for an individual pupil or groups of pupils in the future;
- Decision-making based upon a range of sources that present evidence of learning collected over a period of time. This provides 'value added information' on pupil's learning progress and development, not just 'snapshot' information;
- Information that is contextualised within the educational environment taking into account any home-based or environmental factors that influence a pupil's learning;

- Assessing the factors that support inclusion for an individual pupil in order that wider school, class management and support decisions can be effectively made;
- The active involvement of class teachers, pupils, parents, class peers and others as potential assessors, or participants in the assessment process

Putting Inclusive Assessment into Practice

The first phase of the project ultimately led to a consideration of what is meant by inclusive assessment. This is defined as:

“An approach to assessment in mainstream settings where policy and practice are designed to promote the learning of all pupils as far as possible The overall goal of inclusive assessment is that all assessment policies and procedures should support and enhance the successful inclusion and participation of all pupils vulnerable to exclusion, including those with SEN”.

Inclusive assessment is considered to be an important aim for all educational policy makers and practitioners. A central argument is that inclusive assessment practice should give a lead to general assessment practice and that:

“The principles of inclusive assessment are principles that support teaching and learning with all pupils. Innovative inclusive assessment practice demonstrates good assessment practice for all pupils”.

Inclusive assessment explicitly aims to prevent segregation by avoiding (as far as possible) forms of labelling and by focussing on learning and teaching practice that promotes inclusion in a mainstream setting.

Inclusive assessment can only be realised within an appropriate policy framework and with the appropriate organisation of schools and support to teachers who have a positive attitude towards inclusion.

Useful Contact Details

Parents Associations of Community and Comprehensive Schools

www.paccs.ie or info@paccs.ie 086 8431118

NPCpp www.npcpp.ie/ or npcpp@eircom.net
(01) 8302 740/47

Dyslexia Association of Ireland www.dyslexia.ie
(01) 6790276

State examinations commission www.examinations.ie
(090) 664 2700

NEPS

Head Office	(01) 889 2700
Eastern Region (East Coast Area)	(01) 283 3028
Eastern Region (Northern Area)	(01) 889 2700
Eastern Region (South W Area)	(01) 461 4824
Midlands Region	(044) 9337023
Mid-Western Region	(061) 430027
North-Eastern Region	(046) 9093310
North-Western Region	(071) 9141322
South-Eastern Region	(051) 310028
Southern Region	(021) 4536358
Western Region	(091) 864518

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Useful Resources

[SEN Teacher.org](http://SENTeacher.org) - [Free Printables/](#)

This website offers a range of resources which are free to download, including printable worksheets, handouts and teaching aids, most of which can be customised to suit a range of learners.

Applications for Resources for Pupils with Special Educational Needs (2010-2011) are available from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).

www.ncse.ie/for_schools/NCSEGuidelines.asp/

or SENO list for your area / County

www.ncse.ie/contact_us/SENO_List.asp/

for the role of the SENO officer

www.ncse.ie/uploads/1/RoleOfSENO.pdf/

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