



CIRCULAR TO BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT AND PRINCIPAL TEACHERS OF NATIONAL SCHOOLS

Applications for special classes for children with disabilities.

1. Introduction

Following a review, the Department of Education and Science has decided to introduce new procedures for establishing special classes for children with certain special educational needs arising from disabilities. The revised procedures take effect from the date of this Circular.

1.1 Special classes for children with certain disabilities

Special classes are established for children with certain special educational needs arising from the following disabilities:

Disability	SERC recommended pupil-teacher-ratio	Current pupil - teacher ratio
Visual impairment	8:1	8:1
Profoundly hearing impairment	6:1	6:1
Hearing impairment	7:1	7:1
Mild General Learning Disability	11:1	13:1
Moderate General Learning Disability	8:1	9:1
Severe/Profound General Learning Disability	6:1	6:1
Emotional Disturbance	8:1	9:1
Severe Emotional Disturbance	6:1	6:1
Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders	6:1	6:1
Physical Disability	10:1	12:1
Multiple Disabilities	6:1	6:1
Specific Learning Disability	11:1	11:1
Specific Speech and Language Disorder	7:1	7:1

The Department of Education and Science is working towards bringing all pupil-teacher-ratios in line with the recommendations of the Special Education Review Committee.

Since 1994, children in special classes have been counted on the ordinary roll for staffing purposes. This arrangement was put in place for the purpose of promoting the integration of children from special classes into mainstream classes. The Department would remind schools that arrangements must be made for the appropriate integration of children with special educational needs attending special classes into mainstream classes according to their level of needs and attainments. Evidence will be required from time to time that such is happening in respect of individual children.

2. New Procedures

The Chairperson of the Board of Management of a school wishing to establish a special class to cater for children with special educational needs arising from any of the above disabilities should write to the Inspector stating that the school is seeking to establish a special class for children with special educational needs arising from a particular disability and requesting that the Inspector visit the school to review the case for such an appointment.

3. Information required by the Inspector

The school must have the following information available to the Inspector when s/he calls:

- Type of special class being sought;
- Name and Date of Birth of each child;
- Child's current class level and attainments;
- Specialist reports, e.g. psychological reports or, where appropriate, other reports audiological, speech and language therapy;
- Confirmation that the children concerned are within reasonable commuting distance of the school – mileage from home to school should be detailed for each child.
- Confirmation that the school has received parental agreement regarding enrolment in the special class in respect of each child;
- Confirmation that suitable accommodation is available or can be made available in the event of the establishment of a special class.

4. Criteria for appointment

Initial criteria to establish a special class include:

- A sufficient number of eligible children;
- Availability of suitable accommodation;
- Distance from home to school for the children concerned is reasonable for commuting purposes;
- Whether other suitable provision is available in the school and/or in the local area for the children in question.

5. Notification to schools

The Inspector will evaluate the information made available and subsequently notify schools if s/he intends to forward the application to a relevant senior Inspector for further consideration. This should not be construed that the applications have been approved. Alternatively, the Inspector will notify the school concerned that the application has failed to meet the initial criteria for a special class. [In this event, the Inspector may advise the school and the Department in regard to the provision of a full or part-time resource teacher.]

School Authorities may appeal such a decision to the Special Education Section of this Department.

The Department will notify schools when a class has been sanctioned. Schools should allow a minimum of two months' processing time after the Inspector has advised the school that the application has been forwarded to the relevant senior Inspector. Schools, which have not heard from the Department within this time, should contact the Special Education Section at the address below.

6. Appointment of a permanent teacher

All posts are sanctioned on a temporary basis initially. Posts are sanctioned on a permanent basis when the relevant pupil-teacher-ratio has been achieved in the special class for two consecutive quarters and arrangements have been put into effect for appropriate integration into mainstream classes. The relevant quarterly enrolment dates are the end of March, June, September and December.

The Chairperson of a school seeking a permanent appointment should write accordingly to the School Inspector giving details of the relevant enrolments.

Enquiries about this circular should be made to:

Special Education Section 1
Department of Education and Science
Cornamaddy
Athlone
Co Westmeath

Telephone No. (0902) 74621 or (01) 873 4700
Fax No. (0902) 76939

L Kilroy
Principal Officer

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