

Frequently Asked Questions: Education Therapy Service

FAQ for Phase 1

Last updated: 06 February 2026

Q: How were the 45 schools determined for participation in the initial phase?

A: Initial schools and clusters has been determined based on robust engagement with the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE), the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).

A framework, including a weighting system, has been developed in order to identify schools for inclusion in the initial phase of the ETS. A number of factors were considered, including therapy supports available through existing services, the needs and number of students per school, date of school establishment, together with the NCSE's regional structure.

The ETS is an additional support for children with special education needs. It is to supplement and not replace existing children's health and disability services and it is intended that it will work in a complementary manner with Primary Care and Children's Disability services.

It is important to note that this is the initial phase of the ETS and the intention is to extend support to all remaining special schools through subsequent phases as soon as possible.

Q: How will the second cohort of schools be identified for the next phase?

A: Future phases will be guided by the same framework used to identify schools for the initial phase. Further rollout of the ETS will take place on a phased basis, with wider implementation across additional special schools during the 2026/2027 school year. The service will continue to expand over time, ultimately extending to both special and mainstream classes.

Q: In the interests of transparency, will the system and results that determined which schools were identified for participation in the initial phase be published?

A: The Department is committed to transparency and has outlined the methodology used to determine participation in the initial phase. This is based on a framework, including a weighting system, developed in consultation with the DCDE, the HSE and the NCSE. At this stage, the priority is to deliver the ETS effectively and equitably, guided by this framework and the phased approach to rollout.

Q: Why was my school not included and when will my school be included?

A: It is important to note that while 45 special schools have been identified for participation in the initial phase, further special schools will be included in the 2026/2027 school year. While there are many deserving schools, this is the start of a new initiative which will see all schools benefit in the coming years. In the meantime, a therapy service for schools (previously known as ETSS) is already in place through the NCSE, providing:

- Sustained In-School Therapy (SIT) for 18–24 months (currently supporting 22 schools in the Eastern region and 28 schools in the Western region since September '25)
- Regional Therapy – Teacher Professional Learning with follow-on implementation support, focusing on Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports; all schools can apply in the 2025/2026 school year via the NCSE website.

Q: How were specific regions or schools determined for inclusion over others?

A: Identification of regions and schools for the initial phase was guided by the methodology outlined. A framework, including a weighting system, was used and considered factors such therapy supports available through existing services, the needs and number of students per school, date of school establishment, together with the NCSE's regional structure. The focus is on beginning implementation in areas where the service could have the greatest early impact. Subsequent recruitment and rollout campaigns in 2026 will extend the service to additional counties and schools, in line with these same regional structures and the phased approach to implementation.

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Q: Can schools apply to join ETS?

A: Participation in the initial phase was based on a framework to guide participation, not a competitive application process. This is the start of a new initiative that will see all schools benefit in the coming years through a phased roll out. While ETS rolls out, schools can continue to access support through the existing Education Therapy Support Service (ETSS), including Sustained In-School Therapy (SIT) and Regional Therapy/TPL.

Q: When and how will schools participating in the initial phase be notified?

A: Special schools participating in Phase 1 will be confirmed early in 2026. Once confirmed, formal letters will be issued to participating and non-participating schools for Phase 1, and stakeholders will be briefed accordingly.

Q: What happens next for special schools participating in Phase 1?

A: Special schools participating in Phase 1 will receive a formal notification letter, followed by a programme of supports to help them prepare for therapists arriving this academic year. This will include information sessions, webinars and engagement with NCSE therapy managers to plan priorities, discuss readiness, and outline how universal, targeted and individualised supports will be introduced once therapists are in place.

Q: What supports are available to me while I wait to be added to the ETS?

A: While ETS is being introduced on a phased basis, schools are encouraged to continue accessing existing strands of the Education Therapy Service (ESS), which remains operational. Supports include:

- Sustained In-School Therapy (SIT) – up to 18–24 months, currently active in 50 schools.
- Regional Therapy (RT) – Teacher Professional Learning and implementation support, open to all schools for 2025/26 via NCSE's TPL programme.

Q: How have school stakeholders been engaged throughout the development of ETS?

A: While participation in Phase 1 was based on an agreed methodology and data from education and health partners, the wider design and development of the Education Therapy Service is being shaped by extensive stakeholder engagement. School management bodies, parents, health and education therapy professionals and other partners have contributed valuable insights on how the service should operate in practice and how it can integrate effectively with existing supports. Engagement is continuing throughout the development and phased roll out of ETS. This includes focus groups and service design work with school communities, and direct input from children and young people to ensure their experience informs how the service evolves. This iterative approach allows ETS to remain responsive, evidence informed and aligned with the needs of schools as the services scales nationally.

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General FAQ

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Developing structures and alignments with existing children's services such as CDNT's and Primary Care is ongoing. These FAQs will be updated regularly to reflect progress and updates on this work.

Q: What is the Education Therapy Service (ETS)?

A: The ETS is a national therapy service in education, delivered by the NCSE. It will develop an embedded therapy service, focusing initially on Occupational Therapy and Speech and Language Therapy support.

Q: When will the ETS be available in schools?

A: The service is expected to begin in some special schools later in the 2025/26 school year. It is envisioned that all special schools will have access to this service within the 2026/27 school year. It is anticipated that the ETS will be available to special classes and mainstream schools following the rollout to special schools.

Q: Which schools will receive ETS support first?

A: ETS will begin in the first 45 special schools participating in Phase 1. The roll out will expand gradually to mainstream schools, with further details to be shared as planning progresses.

Q: What types of support will ETS provide?

A: Each special school will have an SLT and OT assigned to it. The service will use a multi – tiered model of support, which means:

- Universal support for all children and young people
- Targeted support for groups of children and young people with similar needs, and
- Individualised support for children and young people with the most complex needs.

This approach ensures that children and young people with the highest level of need receive the most appropriate support.

Q: What are the three strands of ETS support?

- A:**
- Strand I – Embedded Therapy Support: Therapists are assigned to special schools to deliver universal, targeted and individualised support. *This is a new support being rolled out as part of ETS.*
 - Strand II - Sustained In- school Therapy (SIT): Therapists work intensively with a cluster of schools over a two year period to support identified school needs. (All school types are supported by the SIT strand).
 - Strand III - Regional Therapy (RT): Teacher professional learning with follow-up implementation supports, available to all school types across NCSE regions.

Q: What will the addition of Strand I bring to schools?

A: Strand I introduces an embedded therapy service, with therapists assigned to special schools. This will support strong relationships between therapists and teachers, enabling co-design, joint problem-solving, and consistent support for children and young people. It also allows for collaboration with parents and existing services like Children Disability Network Teams (CDNTs) and Primary Care.

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General FAQ

Last updated: 06 February 2026

Q: Who will deliver the therapy services?

A: Therapists will be employed by the NCSE and work under a robust clinical governance structure. Clinical supervision will be provided by therapy managers to ensure high quality, evidence based practice. In the early stages of ETS, support will be provided by Occupational Therapists (OTs) and Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs). Physiotherapists may also become involved as the service expands.

Q: How will ETS work with existing services like Children Disability Network Teams or Primary Care?

A: ETS is designed to complement existing services. Therapists will collaborate with teachers, parents, and external services to ensure coordinated support for children and young people

Q: Will mainstream schools have access to ETS?

A: Yes, over time the service will expand to include all special and mainstream classes. The initial focus is on special schools.

Q: How does ETS build on previous initiatives?

A: ETS builds on the work of:

- The Educational Therapy Support Service (ETSS)
- The School Inclusion Model (SIM)
- The HSE In-School Therapies Pilot
- Experience of therapy teams and clinicians that have worked in schools through existing service such as CDNTs

Q: How can I get more information about ETS?

A: You can visit the [NCSE website](#) for the latest updates, news, and information about the Education Therapy Service. The site will be regularly updated as the service develops.

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FAQ for Parents

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Q: What professionals will be involved in the Education Therapy Service?

A: In the early stages of ETS, your child's school will be supported by Occupational Therapists (OTs) and Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs). As the service develops, other professionals such as Physiotherapists may be introduced.

Q: What will the therapists be doing?

A: Therapists will work with your child's school to support the learning and participation of all children and young people. Their work will look different in every school. Examples include:

- An Occupational Therapist helping a teacher adapt the classroom environment to better support children and young people's needs.
- An Speech and Language Therapist supporting a teacher to use visuals in the classroom to help children who are not yet speaking to participate in learning.
- OT and SLTs working with a child or young person, their parents/guardians, and teacher to co-design and implement a Student Support Plan, in collaboration with HSE therapists and other professionals where relevant.

Q: How is the Education Therapy Service different to the services the HSE provides?

A: ETS focuses on supporting children in school. While HSE services often focus on the family unit, ETS therapists work within the school community to:

- Improve school environments (e.g. classrooms, yards, quiet spaces) so all children can thrive.
- Provide training and follow up support to teachers and the whole school community, helping them apply strategies in real life classroom settings.
- Provide individualised supports to children and young people to support their participation and engagement in school

ETS and HSE services are designed to complement each other, working in partnership to support children and families.

Q: How do I refer my child for Education Therapy Service?

A: You don't need to make a referral. ETS uses a multi-tiered model of support, meaning all children can benefit — not just those receiving individual therapy. If your child's school is participating in Phase 1, a therapist will be assigned to the school. They will work with the principal and school team to plan how best to support students, including individualised supports where appropriate.

Q: My child has complex needs. Will they be prioritised for therapy?

A: The ETS model ensures that children with the greatest level of need receive the greatest level of support. However, children with complex needs will continue to access supports through their CDNT or Primary Care Services

Q: How often will a therapist see my child?

A: The ETS Model of Support allows the therapists to be flexible in how they work in schools. Your child will benefit from therapists being regularly present in their classrooms, working with their teachers and – where appropriate with your consent – working directly with your child to implement individualised educational supports.

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Q: How often will I engage with a therapist about my child?

A: Engagement will vary depending on your child's needs and the support being provided. ETS therapists will work with you to agree on the best way to stay in touch, including how often and by what method (e.g. phone, email, in-person).

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FAQ for Schools

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Q: We applied for NCSE Sustained In-school Therapy (SIT) in 2024/2025. How does ETS differ, and will this affect our application?

A: ETS includes SIT as one of its three strands. Schools previously or currently involved in SIT will continue to receive support as agreed with the school community.

Q: Do we need to provide a dedicated therapy space in school?

A: No. ETS therapists will work within the existing spaces available in your school.

Q: Who oversees the therapists work?

A: Therapists are employed by the NCSE and work under a clinical governance structure.

- All therapists are CORU registered and follow CORU's professional code of conduct.
- They receive regular supervision and CPD.
- Each therapist reports to a Therapy Manager structure. Therapy Manager's coordinate service delivery and manage any issues arising.

Q: What will the therapist be doing in the school?

A: ETS therapists work under a multi-tiered model of support, which includes:

- Collaborating with school leaders to identify whole school priorities and opportunities for continuous professional development for teachers and Special Needs Assistants.
- Supporting individual students and families based on educational needs
- Liaising with HSE and DEY colleagues to coordinate supports across health and education

Q: Can we refer students to the therapists for assessments and direct therapy?

A: ETS therapists will work with your school team to identify needs across all tiers of support, including individualised support.

Q: Will therapists work with teachers and SNAs in the classrooms?

A: Yes. ETS therapists use a coaching and modelling approach, supporting teachers and the whole school community to apply therapy informed strategies in everyday practice.

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Q: Will therapists meet with parents?

A: Yes. ETS therapists will engage with families and seek consent before discussing any individual student's needs. Additionally, as part of the service design, we are consulting with parents to understand their communication preferences and how they wish to be involved in the process.

Q: Will ETS therapists work with other services and agencies?

A: Yes. Collaboration with external services is a key part of ETS, helping to streamline therapy resources across health and education.

Q: When will all special schools be supported?

A: It is anticipated that all special schools will have an assigned OT and SLT during the 2026/27 academic year.

Q: What about special classes in mainstream schools?

A: Special classes in mainstream schools will be prioritised in the next phase. In the meantime, teachers can access Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) through ETS Regional Therapy, which includes in-school modelling and coaching. The Regional Therapy support pathway can be accessed [here](#) through the NCSE TPL Calendar.