

NCSE Guidelines for the Review of SNA Allocations 2025/26

Summary

- The NCSE will commence a national series of SNA reviews through 2025/26 under the terms of circular 0032/2025
- For 2025/26 all NCSE reviews incorporate 3 elements:
 - a. Student significant primary care need
 - b. School based deployment of existing SNA allocation
 - c. School based practice
- Reviews for 2025/26 will focus on schools where:
 - a. A school review was not possible to complete in 2024/25 and is re-scheduled
 - b. Schools have not been reviewed in the last 2 years
 - c. Schools with above SERC allocations in special classes
 - d. Schools where a number of students from mainstream have moved into the special class in the school
 - e. Schools who apply for additional resources within the application window.

Schools can apply where children have enrolled with complex medical or physical needs. The school's overall allocation and current level of need will form part of any review outcome.

 - f. Schools selected by NCSE for a review (NCSE initiated review)
- NCSE does not require the provision of psychological/multi-disciplinary/health-based reports to evidence SNA needs in a review.
- NCSE reviews are conducted on a whole school basis combining a review all SNA posts in the school
- Schools will be resourced on a whole school allocation basis. Schools are expected to deploy SNA posts to their mainstream or special class based on the greatest level of need across the student population.
- Special schools will continue to be resourced from a baseline of SERC ratios with the significant primary care needs of students resourced above and beyond these ratios only on an exceptional needs' basis.
- NCSE reviews are subject to a decision by the NCSE Review Panel who determine the outcome of a review.



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- There are 3 outcomes to an NCSE review:
 - a. No change in allocation
 - b. An additional SNA allocation
 - c. A determination of a surplus allocation relative to existing primary care needs
- Support on the appropriate deployment of SNA resources will be available to all schools
- Where a school receives a determination of a surplus allocation, the allocation is not reduced until the end of the 2025/26 academic year.
- Circular 0030/2014 clearly outlines that SNA support should not be considered as the response for the management of behaviour.
- **The window for applications commences on Monday, September 15th and closes Friday, October 24th. This allows schools with significant needs 6 weeks to apply.**

1.0 Introduction and Context

The purpose of these NCSE guidelines is to outline to school Patrons, Boards of Management, leadership teams and to school personnel the arrangements for SNA reviews undertaken by the NCSE from September 2025.

The NCSE SNA review process is referenced in the Department of Education Circular 0032/2025 as the mechanism by which schools can apply for a review of their current SNA allocation.

1.1 Timeline for the Application Process

To align with the SNA re-deployment scheme and the annual allocation of SNAs for the following year, the 2025/26 application window will commence on September 15th and close on October 24th.

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This 6-week application window allows schools who would like to request a review, six weeks to do so.

On receipt of a new application, local regional teams will contact each school to commence the review process. Priority will be given in the immediate weeks to schools who requested a review in 2024/25 which has not yet occurred.

Outside of the application window, NCSE will select schools for review on national basis.

1.2 The Review Process

1. A review can be requested where a school believes:

(a) they require additional SNA support on the basis of newly presenting significant primary care needs in the school

or where

(b) they have surplus SNA posts in the school relative to the presenting significant primary care needs and with a reduced allocation can safely manage the care needs of children in their care.

a. Schools who fall under category (b) must have a full review in the school to substantiate the profile of significant care needs presenting before any proposed reduction can take place.

2. NCSE will also carry out reviews by selection including but not limited to:

- i. Schools have not been reviewed in the last 2 years
- ii. Schools with above SERC allocations in special classes
- iii. Schools where a number of students from mainstream have moved into the special class in the school
- iv. Schools selected by NCSE for a review (NCSE led review)

A review can be completed in three ways:

- A full review in the school especially if no review has been carried out in 2024/25



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- A focused review in the school where a review has been carried out in 2024/25 and the request for review arises on foot of a very small number of students
- An administrative review where there has been little change to the school's care needs profile.

3. Schools are requested to have all paperwork and consent forms completed and ready for the SENO(s) on the day of the review

Schools with the following profile will be considered for additional SNA support
Schools with no/ limited SNA allocations
Schools with a children/young people with new complex medical needs
Schools with children/young people with new physical complex needs
Schools with a significant number of students with complex needs at level 3 on the care needs register

The role of observation during an SNA review

- As part of the information gathering process, the SENO may carry out an observation of the school environment to understand the school size, classroom size and layout, the location of toilets, accessibility (ramps, lifts, etc) and if there is a split campus, etc.
- Observation may be used as one part of the information-gathering process. It may not be necessary or appropriate to observe every student.
- Relevant documentation will be examined to allow the SENO to determine the needs of each student and determine their eligibility for SNA support.
- SENOS will consult:
- Student Support Plans (SSP's) and SMART targets for developing independence
- Whilst not required professional reports where available can provide important information in relation to a student's primary care needs and will be consulted on this basis.

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- The decision on the students to be included in the review and/or observed will be determined by the SENO. Level 1 students are not included as part of an SNA review as their needs are to be met at whole school level.

Observing students within the environment:

It may be helpful to observe students in the school setting where:

- The level of care needs is not easily verifiable from the SSP.
- The student is new to the school, and care needs are not easily verifiable from the SSP.

It may not be necessary to observe the student in the school setting where:

- The student is presenting with Level 3 care needs which are well and clearly documented in the SSP.
- The student has intermittent care needs, such as a chronic health condition, which are not observable.
- The student may become distressed by a visitor to the room.
- The needs of the student are intimate or sensitive in nature e.g. where a student requires intimate care, or where the student is presenting with self-injurious behaviour or is distressed. Care must be taken to preserve the dignity of students.

1.3 The Outcome of a Review

All SNA reviews will result in one of the following outcomes:

- a. No change in the level of care need identified (and no change in the resultant SNA allocation)
- b. An increase in the level of care need identified (which if significant would see an increase in the SNA allocations to the school)

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- c. A decrease in level of care need identified in the school (which if significant would result in a reduction in SNA allocations as the care needs of the children could be appropriately supported with less resources than are currently allocated).

There are two phases in the determination of an NCSE review of an SNA allocation to a school.

The local SENO will complete phase 1 of the review. This phase includes the following:

1. A review of the significant primary care needs of students in the school
2. A review of school SNA deployment practice
3. A request for detail on practices relating to the management of behaviour in the school community

The SNA review panel will complete phase two of the review. This phase includes:

1. An analysis of the information and detail gathered and presented by the SENO and
2. A determination of the outcome of the review taking into account the national profile of need
 - a. This ensures children with the greatest level of need receive the greatest level of support and in line with all national budgetary parameters.

The determination of the outcome of the review is the responsibility of the NCSE review panel. Only on completion of both phases above, will a school be advised of an outcome of a review.

The review panel will provide each school with a rationale outlining the reason for the outcome of the review.

This rationale can be discussed with the local SENO who can then guide the school on the appropriate deployment of resources. The local regional teams also provide clustered support on deployment to schools. Schools are advised to contact the local SENO for access to this type of support.

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1.4 Changes in the NCSE Review Process

There are some important changes to the review of a school's allocation which are intended to improve the process for both the school community and the overall appraisal of care needs of children and young people in a school community.

- The same SNA review process now applies to Special Schools and Mainstream schools.
- The pre SNAR consultation meeting is no longer obligatory and is at the discretion of the local SENO.
- The SENO Support presentation is now replaced by a Self-Guided online webinar that schools can access at their own convenience. **Webinar available on the SNA review webpage.**
- There is no longer a requirement for the provision of psychological/multi-disciplinary reports in any NCSE SNA review. If reports are available, the SENO can review available reports, but they are no longer required.

1.4.1 Documentation required during a review

Documentation required during an SNA review includes the following:

1. Parent/Guardian consent forms
2. Student Support Plans for relevant students
3. Medical or care plans (where applicable)
4. Professional reports (if available and relevant)
5. Inclusive reflection practice document (where relevant)

1.4.2 Additional supplementary documentation

NCSE reviews are conducted on a whole school needs-based analysis, To be clear, this can include mainstream and special class allocations.

- As a result, a review of the SNA allocation of a special class in isolation is no longer operational. This means all SNA reviews will review the total SNA allocation to a school on a whole school basis.
- From September 2025, any review of an SNA allocation will include:

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- a review of student care needs and
- school-based deployment of current SNA allocation (as at present) accompanied
- an analysis of school-based practice on an evidence informed basis including NCSE Relate (behaviour), autism and therapeutic based practices.

1.5 Behaviours of Concern

- Circular 0030/2014 clearly outlines that SNA support should not be considered as the first response for the management of behaviour.
- Behaviours of concern should be explored to find the ‘why’ behind the behaviour i.e what is being communicated by the child or young person.
- The behaviour should be supported holistically with whole school and whole class approaches and individual needs supported by the class teacher with advice and support from a special education teacher where necessary
- The Inclusive Practice Reflection document available with these Guidelines will support schools with this holistic approach. **Document and video overview available on the NCSE SNA review webpage.**
- The Inclusive Practice Reflection document is a working document and can support schools to reflect on their current practice and to inform future planning.
 - a. where a behaviour indicates an underlying care need e.g. toileting or feeding, a whole school SNA review can be initiated.
- The Inclusive Practice Reflection document must be submitted as part of an SNA review where a school deploys SNA allocation to support regulation needs and the management of behaviours of concern.

2.0 The Role of the SNA

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- Circular 0032/2025 (<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-education/circulars/special-needs-assistant-allocation-202526/>) does not change the role of the SNA nor does it amend the existing employment terms and conditions of SNAs.
- The role of the SNA continues to be; to support the care needs of students; to assist classroom and special education teachers to ensure that the student is able to access education, as set out in 2 Section 5 of DES Circular 30/2014 <https://circulars.gov.ie/pdf/circular/education/2014/30.pdf>
- It is expected that schools will regularly review and reprioritise the deployment of SNAs within mainstream settings and allocate resources to ensure those with the greatest level of care need receive the greatest level of support. Primary care needs should continue to be interpreted in the context of Circular 30/2014 <https://circulars.gov.ie/pdf/circular/education/2014/30.pdf>
- SNA duties are assigned at the discretion of the Principal, or another person acting on behalf of the Principal, and/or the Board of Management of a school or ETB in accordance with Circular 0071/2011 <https://circulars.gov.ie/pdf/circular/education/2011/71.pdf>
- The work of SNAs should, at the principal's or teacher's direction, be focussed on supporting the particular care needs of the student/s and should be monitored on an ongoing basis and modified accordingly.
- The role of the SNA is not to provide additional tuition, as this is the role of qualified teachers to provide additional teaching to students with special educational needs.

3.0 SNA Re-deployment

- The Redeployment Scheme will operate as outlined in section 5 of circular 0032/2025 where the NCSE SNA review identifies a reduction in care needs in a school this may result in a surplus of SNA(S) posts.
- It is crucial that this allocation is transferred to a school where an increased level of primary care needs has been identified.



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- It is important in these cases that a SNA(s) can be redeployed to a school where a vacant post arises.
- This will facilitate retention of skilled and experienced SNAs in our education sector to support the best outcome for children with significant care needs in our schools.
- Work is ongoing on the details of the redeployment scheme for Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) and this will be communicated when finalised.
- The Redeployment scheme will be operated by the NCSE.
- It is intended that the SNA redeployment scheme will commence during 2025/26 to provide an opportunity to redeploy SNAs as the need arises for the start of the 2026/27 school year.
- When this scheme is introduced, it will be supported by specific training and webinars for schools.
- Updates and further information on the SNA Redeployment Scheme will be published on the NCSE website www.ncse.ie and the SNA Information Hub on www.gov.ie

4.0 Appeals of SNA Allocations to the NCSE

The NCSE has developed a revised appeal mechanism for schools that are not satisfied with the **outcome of the SNA Review**.

- All school appeals will be processed by the NCSE review panel called **NAPSA – the NCSE Appeals Panel for SNA Allocations**
 - This panel will be comprised of NCSE officials independent of the allocation review panel.
- All Appeals of an SNA outcome must be submitted to the NCSE **within 10 working days of the issuing of the SNA review outcome**.
- A Guidance Note for schools on the Appeals process is available on the NCSE website.
 - The guidance document made clear that an appeal is made only where a school review has already taken place.



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- In all other circumstances, the school can make an application for an NCSE review
- The guidance notes clearly outlines that Appeals are subject to a consideration on three key components:
 1. The SENO review process which identifies student significant primary care needs
 2. A school's deployment of existing SNA resources
 3. The NCSE prioritisation process which identifies need in the context of national need and the current budget parameters

4.1 The Appeal Outcome

- When the appeal has been processed by the NCSE Appeal Panel, the outcome will be communicated to the school by email or letter.
- Detailed information on the SNA appeals process and grounds for appeal is published on the NCSE website <https://ncse.ie/ncse-appeals-process>.
- The Review panel, **NAPSA**, will process Appeals with outcomes released at the end of each month.
- Following a consideration of an Appeal, the Appeal Panel will relay an outcome to each impacted school in a timely manner
- The panel will align its timeline for the completion of all Appeal outcomes in tandem with the commencement of the SNA re-deployment process.

4.2 Independent Examination of the Appeal's Process

Where a school is not satisfied that the NCSE **review process** was not followed, it can refer the matter to the Appeals Advisory Committee (AAC). The AAC is a Committee independent of NCSE officials and which comprises an independent chairperson, a representative of school management bodies and a parent representative.

The decision of the AAC is final.



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Further information on this process will be available on the NCSE website following the publication of the NCSE guidelines