

## 2020/2021 SNA Allocation Update

Recently, the DES convened a meeting of the stakeholders in relation to the proposed new Revised Model of allocating SNAs to schools. The purpose of the meeting was:

- to brief stakeholders with regard to its stated intention to implement a revised model of allocating SNAs to schools
- to consult with stakeholders in order to:
  - explore the nature of any challenges and opportunities that may arise during the implementation phase and actions that may be required in this regard
  - consider the supports and information required to support effective implementation
  - consider any other relevant issues.

### **The rationale for frontloading was presented as follows:**

- Parents will no longer need to secure a diagnosis of disability in order to access SNA support
- The administrative burden of the applications process will be removed from schools
- Schools will have greater autonomy and flexibility in how SNA resources are deployed to meet the needs of students
- SNAs will have more certainty around their tenure of employment – possibly on a 2 to 3-year cycle
- Valuable resources will be freed up in the system that will no longer be needed for the completion of assessments (HSE & NEPS).

### **Underlying assumptions:**

- The revised model will be implemented in mainstream schools only in 2020/21 (the application process will remain the same for special classes and special schools)
- A school's allocation will be calculated relative to its SET allocation
- No school will receive a cut to its current allocation in the 2020/21 school year
- Some schools will get an increased allocation (approx. 500)
- Gains may be capped to ensure a wider distribution
- Allocations will be rounded up to the nearest 0.5 or whole post.

### **Proposed Timeline:**

- The Department will reflect on and consider the views of stakeholders expressed in the consultation meetings
- Pilots are running currently in 75 schools this year, they have the new SNA model plus a broader range of supports e.g. OT, speech and language and behavioural therapy
- The intention is that this level of support will eventually be rolled out everywhere in the next few years
- A circular will issue in April
- Allocations will be communicated to schools in May
- Guidelines and training will follow.

### **Operation of the 'front-loaded' SNA model**

- Diagnosis itself is not the best indicator of need, therefore it will not be required for a child to be allocated an SNA, and allocation is at the discretion of the school principal
- Sometimes a child will not need the same level of support throughout their time in school, but currently, if they are assigned an SNA, that stays with them for their school life
- The school will have the autonomy to identify the child's needs and the flexibility to use the SNA support as needed

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- A diagnosis will still be taken on board and will help influence the decision, should one be available, and parents' input will be invaluable for schools to be able to make an educated decision
- Allocation of SNAs to schools by the Department is based on the school profile (i.e. size, no. of pupils with complex learning needs, current school educational needs and, to a lesser extent, social context)
- There will be no loss of SNA allocation for any school.

### Points made on behalf of IPPN:

The concept of front-loading an allocation to schools is sound but only on the assumption that a school's allocation is sufficient and that the system is responsive to need when it is not sufficient. The two positives of the new model are also negatives. No need for a diagnosis is positive but raises a number of concerns around resources and decision-making. Front-loading is also a positive but also raises the issue of identifying the needs of a school accurately. Given that many children will not be given diagnoses as they will no longer need them, how will the DES identify the children with "complex needs"?

- Evidence-informed practice dictates that the pilot be robustly evaluated and that learnings from that evaluation would inform the wider implementation
- Many principals are worried about the shift in responsibility towards them with the new model as they now make the decisions on the allocation of resources
- Rounding to nearest 0.5 or 1.0 does not take into account the large number of posts on 0.83 hours (infant hours)
- If the data set being used to inform the frontloading process is that which was used for the 2017 SET allocation process, the data will not be accurate and will not reflect current need in schools
- The rush to implement the revised model undermines the credibility of the Primary Education Forum which was set up to guard against such circumstances presenting
- The rush to implement the revised model will detract from all that is positive within the draft guidelines
- If the implementation of the new model is a done-deal, as seems likely given the reduced time available to receive applications, it will be very disappointing that the clear feedback from stakeholders recommending deferred implementation will have been ignored
- If the implementation was delayed until the 2021/22 school year, the intervening 12 months could be used to
  - evaluate the pilot properly
  - establish a more accurate profile of schools and the number of children presenting with additional care needs
  - develop a responsive appeals mechanism for circumstances where a school's profile has changed significantly
  - road-test that appeals mechanism within the confines of the pilot to ensure it is fit for purpose.