



Circular No 0010/2013

Circular to the Management Authorities of Primary Schools, Special Schools, Secondary, Community and Comprehensive Schools and the Chief Executive Officers of Vocational Education Committees

Scheme of grants towards the purchase of essential assistive technology equipment for pupils with physical or communicative disabilities

This Circular replaces Circular M14/05 and the accompanying conditions and regulations applying to the application and purchase of equipment for students with special educational needs.

1. Purpose of the Scheme

The purpose of this scheme is to provide grant-aid to schools to allow them to purchase the type of specialist equipment which has been recommended by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) as being essential for pupils who have been diagnosed as:

- (i) having a serious physical disability
- (ii) and/or sensory or communicative disability to the extent that their ability to communicate through the medium of speech or writing is materially curtailed

(iii) where it is clear that existing equipment in the school is insufficient to meet the child's needs without unduly depriving other children of access to the equipment.

(iv) where without such equipment it will not be possible for such children to access the school curriculum.

The recommendation of the NCSE will be based upon accompanying professional reports, as necessary and as set out in Section 4, from relevant professionals, such as Educational Psychologists, Occupational Therapists, Speech and Language Therapists etc.

Professional reports should also clearly identify how, when, and in what way the recommended equipment will be used.

2. Provision under the Scheme

There is now an exceptionally wide range of technological or software support available which can provide assistance to pupils in schools and which has potential to assist children in their academic performance, learning, completion of homework, or which could assist them to achieve a degree of improvement to their educational performance.

All children have particular educational needs and accordingly, it is acknowledged that all children could potentially benefit from, or achieve a degree of improvement to their performance in school, through the provision of technological support or equipment, such as personal computers.

The equipment provided for under this scheme, however, is specialist equipment of a nature beyond that which can normally be provided to pupils by schools through general funding, through funding which had previously been provided to schools through Information and Communication Technology (ICT) provision, or through normal school resources or funds.

Provision under this scheme is made for those pupils whose degree of physical and/or communicative disability is such that without technological support it will not be possible for them to access the school curriculum.

3. Staged Approach

1. In considering the assistive technology needs of pupils, schools should therefore first ensure that all relevant interventions have been put in place to deal with the issue of concern, including teaching key skills and making reasonable accommodations and adaptations.

2. Where pupils have special educational needs, which can be aided by assistive technology support, or existing equipment in the school, the first stage of such support is through the schools existing equipment.

3. Where necessary, schools may also purchase new or additional equipment or software for students from normal school resources or funds.

4. Many students now have personal/tablet computers, or smart phones with equivalent capability, which may have been purchased for them by their parents or alternative sources. Where pupils with special educational needs, or with distinct educational requirements, have personal computers with relevant educational software or technological packages, which can assist them in schools, schools should allow those pupils, subject to agreement and supervision, to use such devices in schools. It will be a matter for schools to ascertain the relevance and appropriateness of the educational equipment or software being used, and to supervise its use in school, in accordance with the schools policies on use of electronic equipment in schools.

5. Where children with more complex disabilities require essential specialist equipment to access the school curriculum, which they do not already have, or which cannot be provided for them through the schools existing provisions, schools may make an application for such equipment to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) under the terms of this scheme.

In doing so, schools should set out how and in what manner the equipment will be used in schools.

4. Students Provided for under this Circular

Provision under this Circular is made specifically for pupils who have a degree of physical or communicative disability to the extent that they require additional individualised specialist equipment without which they cannot access the school curriculum.

(A) The primary categories of disability or need for which assistive technology support will be provided, subject to application by the school and a medical recommendation, are:

Hearing impairment

Visual Impairment

Physical Disability

Severe/Profound General Learning Disability

(B) In some circumstances, where accompanying medical reports and/or other professional reports have outlined that the degree of communicative disability is such that it is recommended that without the support of specialist equipment the child cannot access the school curriculum, equipment may be provided for pupils with the following disabilities.

Moderate General Learning Disability

Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders

Specific Learning Disability

Specific Speech and Language Disorder

Multiple Disabilities

It should not be assumed that all children with a communicative disability or specific learning disability either require, or will qualify for a personal computer under the terms of this scheme. Such equipment will only be provided where medical and/or other professional reports outline that the degree of communicative disability is such that this equipment is essential to allow the pupil to access education and set out how the equipment will provide for this. Schools will also have to show that they engaged in a process of identifying needs, in putting various interventions in place, including utilising the school's current information technology provision.

Schools will also be required to state that they know how the recommended equipment will be used in the classroom and of the educational outcomes the equipment is designed to assist with.

(C) Pupils who have Mild or Borderline Mild General Learning Difficulty, Emotional Behavioural Disturbance, or Severe Emotional Behavioural Disturbance, and who do not have an additional disability as set out in categories A and B above, will not qualify for assistive technology support under this scheme and should be supported from within a schools general provision.

(D) Where it is clear from medical reports that a child is suffering from a severe medical condition, the effect of which may be akin to a physical or multiple disability categorisation, but where medical

professionals have advised that a final diagnosis is proving difficult to obtain due to the nature or uniqueness of the condition, the DES may make an interim sanction for equipment in such instances, where a recommendation has been so made by the NCSE, pending completion of a full diagnosis.

Group Applications

The purpose of this scheme is to provide grant aid to schools to purchase equipment to provide for the needs of individual pupils taking into account their assessed individual medical needs. It is not the policy of the Department of Education and Skills to provide specific types of equipment, such as personal computers or ipads, for all pupils within a particular disability category, or all pupils within a particular special class or school.

Applications for assistive technology support for groups or categories of pupils which are based on a recommendation that all pupils within a particular class or category should be provided with equipment will not be considered under this scheme (whether based on a single assessment of the group, or generic assessments modified for each pupil in the group).

5. Type of Equipment Provided

Given the wide range of equipment and the fact that new assistive technology equipment is constantly being developed, it is not possible to list all of the types of equipment or software which this scheme may provide.

Examples of the type of equipment which will normally be provided include:

- Audiology Supports for children with hearing impairment i.e. FM Radio Systems, Soundfield Systems, Hearing Aids and classroom hearing supports;
- Equipment to assist children with visual impairment including Braille Equipment/Braille Keyboards/ CCTV Equipment with Distance Camera, computer equipment for enhanced text reading and online library and audio equipment for audio books;
- For children with physical or severe communication disabilities: laptop/tablet computers with associated modified software, joysticks, keyboards, touch pads, where it has been outlined that the equipment is essential to access the curriculum.

The following equipment is not provided for under this scheme:

1. Telephones/Smart phones, iphones, ipods, televisions, furniture and fittings, plasma screen TVs, internet access or phone connectivity charges.

2. Communication devices or medical or therapy related devices which are not specific educational interventions, or equipment specifically required as essential for school educational access, and which have a general application outside of school, which are normally provided for children with disabilities by the Health Service Executive (HSE) and which are provided for through the HSE Aids and Appliances scheme are not provided for under this scheme.

6. Generic Equipment

Where branded equipment, or software, is recommended or specified in a medical and/or other professional report, the DES will have discretion to make an allocation of funding for equivalent alternative generic equipment/software and need not be bound to a recommendation for a specific package or brand of equipment.

7. Applications for Equipment

All Applications for special equipment must be submitted by school management authorities as follows:

1. In respect of children with Visual or Hearing Impairment, applications for equipment should be made to the Visiting Teacher Service for Children with Sensory Impairment. Contact details for the Visiting Teacher Service are available at www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/Visiting-Teacher-Service

The Visiting Teacher Service will assess the application and give advice to the SENO in relation to equipment commonly used e.g. technology, large print, tapes, brailers, audiology equipment etc. The SENO will take account of the Visiting Teacher's recommendations when considering applications for equipment for such pupils and make a recommendation to the DES for equipment.

2. All other applications for support should be made to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) with assigned responsibility for the school. Application forms are available at www.ncse.ie.

8. Professional assessments and documentation required

1. Supporting documentation must be submitted to the SENO when making the application. This should include a recent comprehensive and professional assessment of the nature and extent of disability, and details

of the equipment most appropriate for the needs of the pupil. It may involve a psychological assessment, occupational therapy report, physiotherapy report and/or speech/language report.

2. Applications for equipment will be considered on the basis of the following criteria:

- That the professional who assesses the child has made a recommendation that assistive technology is essential for the effective education of the child, including illustrating how the equipment will be used. (An assessment indicating that equipment would be beneficial, desirable, useful or would achieve improvement in performance will not be sufficient since this could be true in the case of any child.)
- Other than in respect of children in category A above, schools will be required to show that they have engaged in sustained efforts to meet the identified needs of the child through appropriate interventions eg teaching the necessary skills, putting in place appropriate accommodations (as evidenced in IEPs), including utilising the school's current information technology provision.
- That the case is made or that evidence is supplied that demonstrates that the child will need the recommended equipment throughout the school day. (Some children may, for example, require the use of a computer only for a short period during the day – such a requirement should be met from within the IT resources already available within the school.)
- That it is clear that the existing equipment in the school is insufficient to meet the child's needs without unduly depriving other children of access to the equipment.

9. Applications procedure

On receipt of an application from a school, the SENO will examine the application in the light of the needs of the pupil, the school facilities and the criteria set out in this circular. Following this process the SENO will decide whether to recommend that grant aid to be made available to the school by the Department of Education & Skills.

On receipt of an application and recommendation from the SENO, the Department of Education and Skills will advise schools on the level of grant approved.

Schools must await the approval of the Department before purchasing equipment.

All equipment must, in general, be purchased with a 3 month period of receipt of the approval letter from this Department.

After purchase, receipted invoices must be submitted with claims for payment and copies retained in the school account.

10 – Procedure to claim a refund for equipment purchased or repaired.

Schools who receive a letter of approval to purchase or *repair equipment may proceed to purchase/repair the equipment and then complete the claim form attached at Appendix 1/Appendix 2 of this Circular.

Completed claims forms should be submitted to :

For Primary and Special Schools: Special Education Section, DES, Cornamaddy, Athlone

For Post Primary Schools: Schools Division Financial, DES, Cornamaddy, Athlone

* Minimum allowable for repair is €20; maximum not to exceed initial purchase price of equipment

11. Returning the completed forms

Please return completed applications to the SENO attached to the school. Contact details for SENOs by regional and County basis are available on the website www.ncse.ie

12. Appeal against a decision not to grant equipment

An appeal against a refusal to provide an assistive technology grant to a school on the grounds that it does not fulfil the criteria set out in this circular, or an appeal against the refusal of the DES to sanction equipment recommended by an NCSE SENO, to sanction part of the recommendation, or to sanction an alternative form of equipment other than that recommended in a professional report, may be made to;

Primary or Special Schools - The Higher Executive Officer, (Assistive Technology) Special Education Section, Department of Education and Skills, Athlone.

Post Primary Schools - The Higher Executive Officer (Assistive Technology) Schools Division Financial, DES, Cornamaddy, Athlone

Where there is a lack of clarity with regard to the appropriateness or requirement for the provision of equipment applied for, the DES may seek the advice of the National Centre for Technology in Education, National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the Special Education Support Service or the Departments Inspectorate Division (See Section 15)

13. Responsibility for equipment

Subject to the provisions of Section 14 of this Circular regarding the transfer of equipment between schools, the equipment will remain the property of the school.

The school's management authority will have responsibility for maintenance, repair, insurance etc. of the equipment. The management authority will ensure safe custody and careful handling of the equipment. A designated teacher in the school should take responsibility for the management of the equipment and for monitoring its effective use within the school. Equipment purchased should normally be kept in the school. However, the pupil in question may, with the consent of the management authority, use the equipment at home.

Although the equipment will be sanctioned for a particular pupil the equipment will, as a rule, remain the property of the school and will be available for allocation to subsequent pupils with similar disabilities. Where the school has no further requirement for the equipment or where a pupil transfers to a different school, the SENO may allocate it to another school in the interests of meeting needs to the greatest extent possible.

14. Transfer of Equipment

Although equipment is sanctioned to support a particular pupil, the equipment is sanctioned to a school and will, as a general rule, remain the property of the school and be available for allocation to other or subsequent pupils with similar disabilities.

However, some of the equipment which is sanctioned is of a specialist and individualised nature and may not be suitable for other students in the school. In such circumstances it is not efficient that such equipment should be retained in a school, when the student for which the equipment was sanctioned transfers to a new school and would have to be re sanctioned for similar equipment in the new school, at considerable expense.

Should the pupil in respect of whom the technology is sanctioned change school, including proceeding to post primary school, the new school, or the school that was sanctioned the technology should consult with the SENO/Visiting Teacher with regard to its transfer with the pupil where it is still appropriate for the pupil's assessed needs. This will ensure that there is no gap in support for the pupil and to enable the pupil to continue to use suitable and familiar resources in their new setting.

Retention of technology may be considered where the technology is out of date, it is no longer suitable to the needs of the transferring pupil or there is another child enrolled/enrolling and in respect of whom the school would be applying to the SENO for the same technology.

Where the school or the pupil has no further requirement for the equipment, the SENO, or visiting teacher in conjunction with the SENO, may allocate it to another school in the interests of meeting needs to the greatest extent possible.

15. Support for Schools

The following organisations can provide support and guidance to school on the use or provision of specialist equipment in schools. The DES may also seek the advice of some of these bodies in considering applications for support.

(i) The National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE)

The NCTE through its Special Educational Needs and ICT Initiative (SEN & ICT) provide ICT support for the particular needs of schools, students and their teachers in the SEN area. Support is provided through publications, presentations and support groups.

A significant amount of support is provided through the SEN section of the NCTE website (<http://www.ncte.ie/SpecialNeedsICT/>) which provides a wide range of advice as well as information on training for continued professional development of teachers in the SEN area. The teachers section of the Scoilnet website (<http://www.scoilnet.ie>) helps to provide a focus for content and links that are of particular interest to teachers of students with special needs. The NCTE also helps to identify suitable software/digital content as well as to produce additional digital content to complement the curriculum in Irish schools. Its Software Central website (<http://www.softwarecentral.ie/>) provides SEN software evaluations and teacher-friendly technology information and advice. The NCTE's SEN and ICT initiative which can be contacted through its websites has been involved in many innovative projects and is constantly looking for innovative uses of ICT in education for students with special needs.

(ii) The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) works with the school community in responding to the personal, social, and educational development of all children, having particular regard to children with special educational needs. It offers a range of services including consultation and assessment to support

individual students or groups of students. Psychologists also engage in work of a more preventative nature by seeking to enhance provision at the whole-school level. NEPS Head Office is located in Frederick Court, 24/27 North Frederick Street, Dublin 1 (Tel: 01 8892700) and it operates from a network of regional and local offices (see www.education.ie).

(iii) The Special Education Support Service (SESS) based in Cork Education Support Centre provide professional development and support for school personnel working with pupils with special educational needs in a variety of educational settings. Details are available on the SESS website at www.sess.ie

(iv) 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 based in 1-2 Mill Street, Trim, Co. Meath; Telephone: 046 9486400; Fax: (046) 9486404. Contact details for SENO attached to each school is available at www.ncse.ie

(v) The Visiting Teacher Service for Children and Young People with Sensory Impairment is provided by the Department of Education & Skills from the time of referral through to third level education. Contact details for the visiting teacher service are available on the DES website www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/Visiting-Teacher-Service

Jim Mulkerrins
Special Education Section

February, 2013

Appendix 1

Application for the refund of Payment for approved Equipment

School Name: _____

Roll No: _____

School Email: _____

Student Name: _____

PPSN Number: _____

Approval Letter: _____ (please give date of approval letter)

| | Item | Make & Model No. | Supplier Name & Address | Cost incl VAT € | Are 3 Quotations Available for Inspection? |
|--------------|------|------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| 1. | | | | | |
| 2. | | | | | |
| 3. | | | | | |
| 4. | | | | | |
| TOTAL | | | | | |

Please include with this claim form the following documentation:

1. A copy of the approval letter issued to your school for this equipment.
2. Original full receipts received from the company / companies outlining the equipment purchased. Claims for part payment of equipment purchased will not be accepted.

Declaration:

I wish to claim a refund of costs involved in the purchase of approved equipment and I confirm that the equipment has been approved and is in use in accordance with the terms of Circular 0010/ 2013.

Signature of Principal / CEO _____

Date _____

Guidelines on Purchasing Procedures

All purchases made with public funds must follow strict procedures

The procedures outlined below apply to hardware, software and IT services

The lowest price quotation should be accepted, but having due regard to value for money and after sales service.

1. Written Quotations Requirement

- *Three written quotations* must be obtained before any expenditure is incurred which involves payment of over €635 to an individual supplier.
- All written quotations should be dated and signed on behalf of the supplier.
- Quotations may not be sought for particular models or brands of equipment – generic specifications should be used when sourcing equipment from suppliers.
- In exceptional circumstances goods and services may only be available from a sole supplier. In such cases a full explanation must be recorded, including a written statement from the supplier signifying sole supplier status.

2. Tax Clearance Certificate (supplier of goods or services exceeding €10,000.00 in any twelve month period)

- A tax clearance certificate (C2) must be obtained from any individual supplier of equipment or services valued at over €10,000.00 in any twelve month period before the expenditure is incurred.

Please note: Insurance cover should be put in place prior to the delivery of equipment.

IMPORTANT: Please ensure that the above guidelines are followed in incurring expenditure from public funds. Careful recording of decisions and reasons for same is essential as well as filing of supporting documentation. As you will be aware, records of expenditure, to include equipment specifications, price quotations, purchase decisions and invoices must be maintained for possible audit.

Appendix 2

Application for Refund of Payment for Approved Equipment Repair

School Name: _____ Roll No: _____ Email address: _____

Student Name _____ PPSN: _____

| Item | Make & Model No. | Repair Company Name & Address | *Cost incl VAT € |
|------|------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| | | | |

** Minimum allowable for repair €20; maximum allowable not to exceed initial purchase price of equipment*

Please note: Original full receipts received from the company / companies confirming payment has been made to them for the repair of the equipment should be forwarded with this Claim Form.

Declaration from SENO / Visiting Teacher:

This is to certify that the repair to the above equipment was economical and essential:

Signed : _____ Date: _____

Print Name: _____ Contact Number: _____

Title: SENO / Visiting Teacher (Circle as appropriate)

Declaration from Principal / CEO:

I wish to claim a refund of costs involved in the repair of equipment, as outlined above, and I confirm that the equipment has been repaired and is in use in accordance with the terms of Circular 0010/ 2013.

Signature of Principal / CEO _____

Date: _____

Internal use:

Cost of Repair Approved by Special Education Section: _____ Date : _____

Payment request approved by Special Education Section: _____ Date: _____

Payment processed by SNTG: _____ Date : _____

Payment Approved by SNTG: _____ Date : _____