



0023/2025

To: Managerial Authorities, Principals and Teachers of Recognised Primary, Post Primary, Community and Comprehensive Schools and The Chief Executives of Education and Training Boards.

Review of Enrolment in a Special Class

1. Summary of Circular

The main areas addressed in the circular are:

- The process of review of enrolment in a special class in primary and post-primary schools
- The process of review to support transition from a special class to full enrolment in a mainstream class
- The process of review to support transition from a special class to another special class of the same designation (e.g. when moving from primary to post-primary school)
- Outlining the information required for review of enrolment in a special class
- Outlining who is involved in the review of enrolment in a special class
- Appendix 1: **Information to Support Transition from a Special Class to another Special Class of the Same Designation**
- Appendix 2: **Special Class Transfer Review Form** details information to support transition from one special class to another of the same designation (e.g. when moving from primary to post-primary school)
- Appendix 3: **Framework to Guide Transition Planning** (what this looks like in practice)



2. Introduction

All schools have a responsibility to be inclusive in their policies and practices. An inclusive school culture enables all children and young people to experience a sense of value, belonging and connectedness within their school communities. This responsibility requires particular consideration for children and young people enrolled in special classes in mainstream schools to ensure their sense of belonging and connectedness within the wider school community is continually fostered and facilitated through their meaningful inclusion in all aspects of school life.

The primary function of a special class is to provide the best educational setting for a child or young person at a point in time. It provides a supportive learning environment to children and young people who are unable to access the curriculum in a mainstream class, even with support, for most or all of their school day.

However, a child or young person who needs to enrol in a special class at a particular point in time may not always require it - as needs may be transient and can evolve and change based on the education the child or young person receives. Therefore, what is appropriate at one stage in a child or young person's educational journey may not be appropriate at another stage. Regular review of enrolment in a special class is therefore required.

The purpose of this circular is to support schools with the review process for children and young people enrolled in special classes. Regular review of enrolment in a special class is good practice. It also helps to ensure that all children and young people enrolled in a special class have a positive and inclusive educational experience that is tailored to their strengths and needs.

A key goal of the education system is that children and young people with special educational needs access and participate in their learning in mainstream educational settings to the greatest extent possible. Special classes play a key role in facilitating this access and participation.

Since 1994, children and young people enrolled in special classes have been counted on the ordinary roll of the school for staffing purposes. This arrangement was put in place for the purpose of facilitating the appropriate inclusion of children enrolled in special classes in mainstream classes (DES, 1999)¹.

¹ Circular 9/99 states that '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'.



A new Circular letter [0080/2024](#) issued to all schools in October 2024 which set out a range of additional measures to support the forward planning of special education provision. Under the new arrangements, parents and guardians of children and young people seeking a special class or special school placement are now requested to notify the NCSE each year. This addresses a key challenge facing the NCSE in previous years where children enrolling in many special classes were not known to the NCSE in advance and had not been adequately factored into forward planning work.

Schools are reminded, for children/young people eligible to access enrolment in special classes, schools must ensure the child/young person's professional reports are confirmed in advance by NCSE and are in receipt of an eligibility letter from the NCSE, before placements can be confirmed.

3. Review of Enrolment in a Special Class

The aim of the review is to:

- Determine whether continued enrolment in a special class is the most appropriate placement to ensure that the child or young person accesses a good quality education.
- Review the child/young person's progress in learning and response to intervention received to inform next steps in the planning, teaching and learning cycle.
- Establish and review existing inclusive practices and opportunities to facilitate increasing levels of inclusion and participation in learning and social activities with peers across the whole-school environment.
- Plan and review whole-school supports for the process of gradual or partial transition into mainstream classes, where appropriate and agreed.

[*The Guidelines-for-Setting Up and Organising Special Classes \(NCSE 2024\)*](#) state 'as learning needs may change over time, a student's enrolment in a special class should be kept under continual review by the school. At a minimum, a review should take place once a year and include a careful examination of the student's progress in achieving their learning targets' (p.4).

Reviewing enrolment in a special class takes place in the context of the provision of opportunities for meaningful engagement and participation in activities with peers within the whole school community. This includes all aspects of school life that take place in classrooms and across the whole school environment. These opportunities may be introduced on a phased basis, depending on the individual strengths and support needs of the child or young



person, and are planned collaboratively with parents/guardians and relevant school staff. The views of the child or young person are central to this process. At an individual level, Student Support Plans should reflect the steps and measures that have been agreed to facilitate opportunities for meaningful inclusion and participation. This involves a review of enrolment in a special class. The process of ongoing review and response to intervention supports decision-making at times of transition.

4. What is a Review of Enrolment in a Special Class?

It is important that enrolment in a special class is reviewed regularly as a child or young person's needs may change over time. The NCSE (2024) Guidelines state that **a review of enrolment should take place at a minimum, once every 12 months**, and include a careful examination of the child or young person's response to intervention and progress in achieving targets, as outlined in their Student Support Plan.

A review of enrolment in a special class, in the context of the ongoing problem-solving process² of assessment of strengths and needs, intervention and review, considers:

- The child or young person's learning, wellbeing and meaningful inclusion and participation in the whole-school community
- The child or young person's views and expectations of their educational experience
- The parent(s)/guardian(s) views and expectations in relation to their child's education
- The child or young person's progress in relation to the targets and interventions outlined in the Student Support Plan
- The opportunities that have been provided for the child or young person to participate in whole school activities
- The supports that have been provided to address barriers to the child or young person's participation in whole school activities with peers
- The views of relevant school staff on the child or young person's progress
- If enrolment in the special class remains optimal based on the child or young person's profile of strengths, needs, interests and response to intervention
- How the current planning for inclusion with peers across the whole school community can be developed, over time, to support the process of inclusion in mainstream classes where appropriate and agreed

² The problem-solving process is outlined in the [*Autism Good Practice Guidance*](#) and [*Continuum of Support Guidelines*](#)



- Review relevant professional reports where available

5. What Information is required for a Review of Enrolment in a Special Class?

Information gathered over time and recorded in the Student Support File³ is central to determining progress and consideration of the appropriateness of continued enrolment in a special class or transition from a special class into a mainstream class. The following information should be considered as part of the review and recorded in the Student Support File:

- Perspectives of the child or young person on their experiences in school and aspirations for the future. To facilitate meaningful participation of children and young people in decision-making, schools are encouraged to have regard to the [National Framework for Children's and Young People's Participation in Decision Making](#) and the [Tusla Child and Youth Participation Toolkit](#). These are based on the Lundy Model of Child Participation and its four elements⁴
- Perspectives of parent(s)/guardian(s) on the child or young person's progress, and aspirations for the future
- Perspectives of relevant school staff who have been involved in supporting the child or young person
- Details of progression of skills across all areas of learning and development, and progress in meeting agreed targets as recorded in the Student Support Plan
- Details of any relevant care needs including current supports and accommodations needed to address these needs
- Information on the frequency and nature of the child or young person's meaningful participation in learning and social activities with peers in mainstream classes and the whole school community
- Details of any significant changes in the child or young person's circumstances which may have impacted (positively and/or negatively) on their development and/or progress
- Details of any supports or involvement accessed through external agencies e.g. National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS),

³ The Student Support File for each child/young person enrolled in a special class contains records of all individualised planning, strengths and needs, targets, meetings with parents/guardians, consultations with other professionals, the child/young person's views, interventions and assessment data.

⁴ Developed by Hub na nÓg in association with Professor Laura Lundy, Queen's University, the Participation Framework provides guidance and checklists for decision-makers on the steps to take in giving children and young people a meaningful voice in decision-making. The *Tusla Child and Youth Participation Toolkit* is aligned to the Lundy model of participation. It includes resources and child-friendly tools and activities to support the implementation of each of the elements of the Lundy model.



National Council for Special Education (NCSE) or the Health Service Executive (HSE)

- Whether the child or young person is on a waiting list to access relevant services

6. Who is involved in the Review of Enrolment in a Special Class?

The review of enrolment in a special class is normally convened by the special class teacher/s and may be attended by:

- Child or Young Person*
- Parent(s)/Guardian(s)
- School staff which may include:
 - Special Class Teacher
 - Special Education Teacher
 - Class Teacher/Subject Teacher
 - Special Education Needs Co-ordinator
 - Guidance Counsellor
 - Principal/Deputy Principal
 - Home School Community Liaison Teacher
 - Special Needs Assistant
- Relevant external professionals, as deemed necessary

The child or young person's views will form part of the review either in person or will be represented at the meeting, as appropriate.

7. When does the Review of Enrolment in a Special Class take place?

The needs of the child or young person will determine when a review of enrolment in a special class should take place. The timing of the review should allow for adequate time to follow-up on agreed actions before the end of the current school year, where necessary. Appendix 3 **Framework to Guide Transition Planning** in this circular is a companion document to support a whole-school review process. It provides an outline of the process and key questions to support collaborative decision-making.

8. What are the Outcomes and Actions from the Review of Enrolment in a Special Class?

At the end of the review meeting, agreement should be reached in relation to one of the following options:



1. Continued enrolment in the special class with planned support for inclusion pending the next review

For many children or young people, the review process will identify the need for continued enrolment in the special class for the following year, with ongoing planning and support for the child or young person's priority learning needs, pending the next review. It is important that children and young people are afforded every opportunity to maximise and benefit from inclusion with their peers. Where it is agreed that enrolment in the special class continues to be most appropriate in meeting the child or young person's needs, the review process will specify opportunities for increased inclusion with the wider school community. Such opportunities should be incorporated into the Student Support Plan for targeted support and intervention.

2. Full Enrolment in a Mainstream Class

Some children and young people enrolled in special classes spend a considerable part of the school day participating in learning and social activities with their peers in mainstream classes and in whole school activities. This enables children and young people to access the curriculum in a mainstream class for most or all of the school day with appropriate supports. In such cases, consideration should be given to planning for full enrolment in a mainstream class, in collaboration/consultation with the child or young person and their parent(s)/guardian(s). To support this process, the Student Support Plan should document planning for increased participation in activities with peers.

Where a phased process of transition into the mainstream class has taken place over time, the parents/guardians, school staff and the child/young person agree that full enrolment in the mainstream class is most appropriate in meeting the child/young person's needs. Following the transition into the mainstream class, the child/young person will continue to receive ongoing support and intervention, as required, through the Continuum of Support, and their progress will continue to be monitored and reviewed.

Parent(s)/guardian(s) and the child/young person should be assured that this will include support from:

- The Class/Subject Teacher
- The Special Education Teacher



- The Special Needs Assistant (if appropriate)
- If needed, access to the special class supports

The views of the parent and student will be central in this process. Parents/guardians may not be aware of the extent of support that can be provided to children/young people by class teachers, special education teachers and special needs assistants in mainstream classes. Therefore, particular emphasis should be placed on detailing how those supports are provided in mainstream classes as part of the Continuum of Support.

Schools may wish to liaise with the NCSE Regional Teams who can provide advice to school staff to support a planned transition to full enrolment in a mainstream class.

Typically, the child or young person who transitions to full enrolment in a mainstream class(es) spends a considerable part of the school day participating in learning and social activities with their peers in mainstream classes and in whole school activities. Children and young people who have transitioned from a special class into a mainstream class will have access to special education teaching supports, in line with the Continuum of Support, when needed. This may mean, for example, that the child or young person's learning needs may be best met on an individual or small group basis or through access to effective team-teaching approaches.

From time to time, some children and young people may benefit from continued access to special class supports. For example, a child or young person who transitions to a mainstream class may be best supported, where necessary, by a Special Needs Assistant known to them. Schools are encouraged to be flexible in their approach.

Where neither of the options are agreed following the Review, and where further advice is deemed necessary to support decision-making in this regard, schools should liaise with the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and/or the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). Schools should contact their SENO or assigned NEPS psychologist/local NEPS office in these cases.



9. Transport

School transport services are operated by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department of Education.

Children/young people are eligible for transport under the School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs where they are attending the nearest recognised mainstream school, special class/special school, that is or can be resourced, to meet their special educational needs.

Eligibility is determined following consultation with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) through its network of Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENO).

Where a child or young person is transitioning to full enrolment in a mainstream class(es) within the same school, the child/young person will retain their entitlement to school transport.

It is important to note that this is not the case when transitioning from an Early Intervention Unit or Speech and Language Class, in these cases a new application is required.

10. Supporting the Transition

This section outlines the process of supporting transitions from special classes in mainstream schools following a review of enrolment.

1. Transitioning from a special class in primary or post-primary schools to full enrolment in mainstream

Information required to support decision-making with regard to transition to mainstream will be the same as the review process previously outlined in this circular. Where there is agreement between parents/guardians, child/young person, teachers and, where appropriate, relevant professionals, that full enrolment in a mainstream class is deemed to be the most appropriate in meeting the child/young person's needs, the school should complete *NCSE Form 5 Leavers Form* and forward to their NCSE Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) as soon as possible.

2. Transitioning from a special class in a junior primary to a special class of the same designation in a senior primary school



For children enrolled in a special class in a junior primary school, the review process informs decision-making in relation to the most appropriate educational provision to meet the child's needs in the senior primary school.

Information required to support decision-making with regard to transition to a senior primary school will be the same as the review process (previously outlined in this circular). Where there is agreement between parent(s)/guardian(s), child, teachers and, where appropriate, relevant professionals, that enrolment in a special class of the same designation continues to be the most appropriate in meeting the child's needs at the time of transfer, the following steps should be followed:

- The principal, parent(s)/guardian(s) and child (where possible) complete and sign the **Transition Form** (Appendix 1)
- Parent(s)/guardian(s) apply for enrolment in a special class (of the same designation) in the senior primary school

School-based information is sufficient to inform decision-making in the vast majority of transitions where there is agreement and clear evidence that the current level of support in the special class continues to be required for the child or young person's active and meaningful participation in school life and learning. **No new professional reports or recommendations will be required when a child transitions from a special class in a junior primary to a special class of the same designation in a senior primary school.**

3. A special class in primary school to a special class of the same designation in a post-primary school

Similarly, for 4th and 5th class students enrolled in special classes, the cumulative review process informs decision-making in relation to the most appropriate educational provision to meet the child or young person's needs in post-primary school.

It is recommended that planning for the transfer to post-primary school should start two to three years in advance of the transition (NCSE, 2024). Preparation for transition to post-primary school should be discussed and included in the review of enrolment in a special class, held from 4th class onwards. Early preparation and planning is essential to support informed decision-making on the part of parent(s)/guardian(s) and the child/young person for the preparation of a phased transition plan.



A decision in relation to whether the special class continues to be the most appropriate enrolment for the child/young person in post-primary school should form part of the review meeting when the child/young person is in 5th class. Decision-making is a collaborative process involving parents/guardians, and relevant teachers. The views of the child/young person are central to this process. The school may also consult with external agencies, including NEPS, NCSE and/or HSE, who may advise in relation to the decision-making process where there are concerns with regard to the appropriateness of enrolment in a special class to meet the needs of the child/young person in post-primary school.

Information required to support decision-making with regard to transition to a post-primary school will be the same as the review process (previously outlined in this circular). Where there is agreement between parent(s)/guardian(s), child/young person, where possible, teachers and, where appropriate, relevant professionals, that enrolment in a special class of the same designation continues to be the most appropriate in meeting the child/young person's needs in post-primary school, the following steps should be followed:

- The principal, parent(s)/guardian(s) and child/young person (where possible) complete and sign the **Transition Form** (Appendix 1).
- Parent(s)/guardian(s) apply for enrolment in a special class (of the same designation) in the post-primary school

School-based information is sufficient to inform decision-making in the vast majority of transitions where there is agreement and clear evidence that the current level of support in the special class continues to be required for the child or young person's active and meaningful participation in school life and learning. **No new professional reports or recommendations will be required when a child/young person transitions from a primary special class to a post-primary special class of the same designation.**

11. What to do if further support is required for the review process

Following on from a review, for some children and young people, there may be a query as to whether enrolment in a special class continues to be the most appropriate based on the child or young person's current level of strengths, needs and response to intervention.



In such instances the involvement of external professionals will continue to be required in order to provide support to the child/young person, parent(s)/guardian(s) and school staff in the decision-making process. Schools should contact their NCSE Regional Team or assigned NEPS psychologist/local NEPS office in these cases.

Further information and guidelines on supporting transitions can be accessed on the NCSE website www.ncse.ie.

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Special Education
20 March 2025



Appendix 1

Information to Support Transition from a Special Class to another Special Class of the Same Designation

This form should only be used to support the transition for children/young people currently enrolled in a special class

Name:

PPSN:

Address:

Date of Birth:

Parent(s)/Guardian(s):

Current School:

Roll Number:

Type of Special Class:

Number of Years Enrolled in Special Class:

The following statements should be reviewed by school staff, parent(s)/guardian(s) and relevant professionals as appropriate.

Please insert Yes or No in the boxes in response to the following statements:	Yes	No
1. The child/young person has a Student Support File which outlines their needs and how these needs are supported by their enrolment in the Special Class		
2. Continued enrolment in a Special Class of the Same Designation remains appropriate based on a review of the child/young person's response to current level of supports and interventions		

Signature of Parent(s)/Guardian(s): _____

Signature of Child/Young Person (where possible): _____

Signature of Principal: _____

Signature of Special Class Teacher: _____

Signature of Mainstream Class Teacher: _____

Date: _____



This completed form should accompany an application for enrolment in a special class of the same designation in another school, along with the following documentation:

- Evidence of a professional report(s) with clinical diagnosis aligned with the type of special class to which the application for enrolment is being made
- Current Student Support File outlining the child/young person's needs, supports, adaptations, interventions and opportunities for inclusion with mainstream peers
- Details of any care needs, supports and accommodations required
- *Education Passport*⁵
- *My Thoughts about School* (or similar outlining the child/young person's views)

⁵ The ***Education Passport*** materials support a 3-phase process to the transfer of student information from primary to post-primary schools.



Appendix 2

Special Class Transfer Review Form Confidential

To be completed when a child or young person is transitioning to a special class of the same designation in another school.

Name:
PPSN:
Address:
Date of Birth:
Parent(s)/Guardian(s):
Current School:
Roll Number:
Type of Special Class:
Number of Years Enrolled in Special Class:

SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Involvement of external agencies/professionals (e.g., Psychology, Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, CAMHS, TUSLA, NEPS, NCSE)		
Name of professionals/agency	Nature and dates of involvement	Summary and recommendations



Summary of School Based Assessment*

Date	Observations/data collected/ tests administered and results

*School based assessment may include formative and summative assessment across all areas of learning and development

SECTION 2: PROFILE OF SKILLS, STRENGTHS, MOTIVATORS AND NEEDS ACROSS AREAS OF DEVELOPMENT

Areas for consideration	Strengths, motivators and needs identified in consultation with the child or young person, key members of staff and parent(s)/guardian(s)
Learning Environment	
Language and Communication Development	
Social Development	



Emotional Development	
Sensory Development	
Functional skills for daily living (self-care, personal safety, independent living, community living)	
Learning across the curriculum	
Literacy skills	
Numeracy skills	



SECTION THREE: PROVISION IN CURRENT SCHOOL

Detail any approaches, supports or strategies that are currently in place to meet priority needs identified:

Detail how transitions are supported across the school day:

Detail the level and frequency of the child/young person's participation in activities (whole-school, class and extra-curricular) with peers across the school community:

What supports the child/young person's participation in whole-school activities with peers?



What are the child/young person's views, hopes and preferences for school and their future?

What are the parent(s)/guardian(s) views and expectations in relation to their child's education?

What are the key recommendations to support the child or young person in their new school?



Names of persons involved in review:

Do parents give consent for this information to be passed to the new school?

Yes / No

Please name school: _____

Signature of Parent(s)/Guardian(s): _____

Signature of Child/Young Person (where possible):

Signature of Principal: _____

Signature of Special Class Teacher: _____

Signature of Mainstream Class Teacher: _____

Date: _____

This completed form should be shared with the child or young person's new school along with the following documentation:

- Current Student Support File outlining the child/young person's needs, supports, adaptations, interventions and opportunities for inclusion with mainstream peers.
- NCCA Education Passport⁶
- My Thoughts about School (or similar outlining the child/young person's views)

⁶ The **Education Passport** materials support a 3-phase process to the transfer of student information from primary to post-primary schools.



Appendix 3

<p align="center">Framework to Guide Transition Planning</p> <p>Transitioning students from special classes to mainstream classes or other special classes of the same designation is a process that requires careful planning and collaboration among educators, parent(s)/guardian(s), and the child/young person themselves.</p>		
What this looks like in school practice	What are we doing?	What do we need to do?
<p>Student Support Plan Review</p> <p>Review and update the child/young person's 'Student Support Plan' (SSP) to reflect transition objectives. Set specific, measurable objectives for the transition</p> <p>Involve teachers, parent(s)/guardian(s) and the child/young person in planning</p> <p>Schedule regular meetings to discuss progress and concerns</p> <p>Including the voice of the child or young person</p>		
<p>Inclusion</p> <p>Does the child/young person participate with peer classroom activities?</p> <p>What planning is there to promote the child or young person's increased participation in classroom activities?</p> <p>Consider the environmental supports. What visuals are used? Where does the child/young person sit in the mainstream classroom?</p> <p>Do children or young people from other classes come to the special class to share activities and build relationships?</p>		



<p>What supports are in place for inclusion in whole school activities such as assemblies?</p>		
<p>Transition throughout the day</p> <p>Transition from home to school - is there a welcome time? Does the child/young person need to regulate when they come to school?</p> <p>Transition to and from activities - does the child/young person need support with this? Countdown timers - transition object or card?</p> <p>Transition to home - is the child/young person prepared? What supports are needed? Would a social story aid understanding? Are transitions planned for with parent(s)/guardian(s)?</p>		
<p>Key Elements of Transition Planning</p> <p>When? Plan early if the child/young person's enrolment is changing</p> <p>Who? Teachers, SNAs, the child/young person, family, health and other professionals (when needed)</p> <p>What? Devise the transition plan and actions that are achievable and focused on changing the environment not the child/young person</p>		
<p>Priority area(s) for further development:</p>		