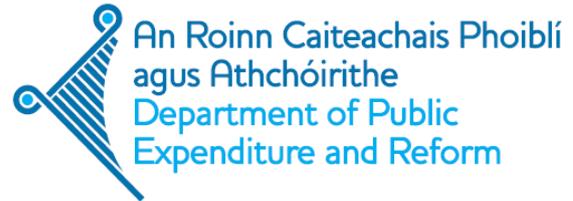




Irish Government Economic & Evaluation Service



Spending Review 2017

Special Educational Needs provision

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Education Vote
Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

This paper has been prepared by staff in the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform in the context of the Spending Review 2017. The views presented in this paper do not represent the official views of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform or the Department of Education and Skills.



Summary of findings

- Special educational needs expenditure increased by €465m (38%) between 2011 and 2017 to €1.68 billion, representing an estimated 18.9% of the Department of Education and Skill's gross current allocation. Since 2004, expenditure on special educational needs has increased by almost 260%, from a total cost of €468m in 2004. The level of special education expenditure is now in excess of what is allocated to the entire Higher Education sector (€1.58 billion).
- There are approximately 47,000 students in receipt of NSCE resource teaching allocations (5.2% of the school population¹) and an estimated 32,500 in receipt of SNA care (3.6% of school population). This has increased from 3.5% and 2.7% respectively in 2011.
- The majority (€1,487m, an estimated 88%) of special education expenditure relates to pay, with additional teacher pay of €1,022m, (61% of total) and special needs assistants pay of €464m (27% of total). A significant proportion of this can be attributable to the nature of resource teacher provision and special needs assistants, and the increases in special classes established.
- There have been various drivers of the increase in expenditure on special education including, the underlying change in the school age population, the increasing proportion of children who are qualifying for SNA and special educational needs supports, and in particular, the increasing number of pupils presenting with an autism diagnosis.
- There has been a considerable shift in the profile of pupils requiring assistance. During the period 2011-16, the number of pupils with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) diagnosis increased by 83%. The current comprehensive review of the SNA scheme, along with the implementation of the FPA recommendation for enhanced data collection by the NCSE, and the upcoming three year full reassessment of SNA allocations, provide the opportunity to identify the most appropriate form of support options to provide better outcomes for pupils with special educational needs having regard to the significant amount of Exchequer investment in this area.
- The removal of the requirement for a medical diagnosis for special education teaching allocation purposes should diminish the incidence of inappropriate diagnosis and the unnecessary labelling of

¹ See Appendix 1 for primary and post-primary school population, 2011/12 to 2016/17, extracted from <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Key-Statistics/>.

children². However, the risk remains for school transport provision which includes the provision of a medical diagnosis as part of the eligibility criteria. Eligibility for the SNA provision requires both a diagnosis of disability and the identification of an assessed care need³. Consequently, the care needs element reduces the risk of inappropriate diagnosis.

- With respect to the SNA scheme, the number of SNAs has grown from 2,988 in 2001 to the current cap of 13,015, an increase of 336%. Expenditure on the SNA scheme rose by 1,287% between 2001-17. Previous research⁴ in the area has highlighted that the separation of budgetary responsibility from responsibility for resource allocation may have contributed to the growth of the Scheme. As highlighted in this research, this arrangement means that the persons recommending, or approving, SNA support are not required to save or prioritise such resources, or to consider opportunity costs for other areas of expenditure, where if savings could be made in one expenditure area, they could be applied at a greater benefit elsewhere in the Education budget.
- There has been a large increase in expenditure on transport for children with special needs, increasing by 42% since 2011. This increase appears to be driven by demand but also more substantially by the type of transport provided; for example, expenditure on private taxis and escorts has increased from €29.5m in 2012 to €47.25m in 2016, an increase of 60%. In the provision of necessary school transport, it is important to ensure the appropriate balance between providing transport to children and meeting the overarching objective that pupils with special needs participate in an inclusive environment with those who do not have such needs, foster independence and engage in the social activities. Assessment of need should be considered and reviewed against that backdrop on an annual basis.
- It is of utmost importance that all special education schemes are monitored, regularly reviewed and revised as necessary, and the outcomes for pupils are captured in a meaningful way. The collection of regular data in particular with respect to outcomes from school reviews and the number of students who had SNA access in previous year that no longer require SNA support can assist in ensuring the most appropriate form of support is being provided.

² <http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/debates%20authoring/DebatesWebPack.nsf/committeetakes/ESJ2016102700002?opendocument#C00200>

³ Application forms relating to SNA application provision are available at: <http://ncse.ie/for-schools>

⁴ https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Value-For-Money-Reviews/pub_sna_vfm_june_2011.pdf

1. Introduction

The paper examines the evolution and drivers of the individual components of special education expenditure and its direction going forward. It reflects on recent reforms and current ongoing initiatives, in particular in relation to the new special education teaching allocation model to ensure more equitable and targeted use of resources for pupils with special educational needs, and the current ongoing review of the special needs assistants (SNA) scheme.

The paper sets out the key drivers of the 38% increase in total special education expenditure between 2011 and 2017. Given the significant amount of State investment in this area, an estimated €1.68 billion in 2017, it is of the utmost importance to ensure that the most appropriate form and level of support to provide better outcomes for pupils with special educational needs is identified and provided.

The paper draws on desk-based quantitative analysis of a range of newly compiled and existing data from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) for the period 2011 to 2017. Prior to this period, data is fragmented and comparisons are not possible. The paper also draws on existing wider analysis of the area, including the Value for Money Review of the SNA Scheme (2011) and the Focused Policy Assessment on Data on Special Needs Assistants (2016), in addition to the NCSE Working Group Report “Delivery for Students with Special Educational Needs: A better and more equitable way”, the NCSE report “Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in School”, and other publications.

The paper provides a useful reference point where the totality and drivers of the components of expenditure on special education in the education sector are set out in a single document.

- Section 2 of the paper provides a general overview of special education provision, categorisation of special educational needs, and a summary of expenditure in the education sector.
- Section 3 focuses on the main components of special education, that is, resource teaching and learning supports, and special needs assistants, including special schools and classes.
- Section 4 provides an overview of the other elements comprising special education, school transport, enhanced capitation and grants.
- Section 5 sets out a summary of the conclusions /key findings.

2. Overview of Special Education provision

Background to Special Education provision

Special education has become a major component of the Irish education system and undergone dramatic changes in recent years. The Education for Persons with Special Education Needs Act 2004, (EPSEN) emphasised the concept of inclusion where all persons, including those with special educational needs, have the same rights as their peers to participate in and benefit from education. Under the Act, every child with special education needs must be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have special education needs, unless to do so would not be in the best interest of the child or, it would impair the effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated.

A special education need is defined under the Act as being:

“in relation to a person, a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition and cognate words shall be construed accordingly;”

This broadening of the definition of special education needs (SEN) has, according to research by the NCSE, greatly affected prevalence estimates⁵. There have been significant developments to the system of special education provision and a considerable increase in the number of children with special educational needs attending mainstream education. More resources than ever are being provided to ensure that the educational needs of these children continue to be met alongside their peers at primary and post-primary level.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), a statutory independent body, was set up to improve the delivery of education services to persons with special educational needs. The Council’s functions are set out in EPSEN and include a research and policy advice function to the Minister for Education and Skills. The Council is responsible, through its network of Special Educational Needs Organisers, for the allocation of resource teacher hours and special needs assistant provision to schools to provide support for the education of children with special needs. It also provides for the establishment of special classes as required.

Education may be provided in mainstream class settings, in special classes within mainstream schools and in special school settings. Provision is made for different special education support structures depending on the

⁵ http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Prevalence_of_SEN_10_09_12.pdf

needs of the pupil, which can include learning/language support teachers, resource teachers and special needs assistants.

Prevalence of Special Education Need

The introduction of the EPSEN Act in 2004 broadened the definition of SEN and has had major implications for the number of children estimated to have SEN. Under the Act, SEN is seen to include a broad range of difficulties ranging from physical disabilities to learning disabilities and emotional behavioural difficulties, and “any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition”.

Current statistics indicate that an estimated 5.2% of the school population are in receipt of NSCE resource teaching allocations and an estimated 3.3% are in receipt of SNA care. Some pupils may be getting both forms of support, indicating a combined lower percentage overall.

The NCSE 2011 Report No 9: A Study on the Prevalence of Special Educational Needs noted that, in an international context, estimates of a special educational need prevalence can range from less than 1% in some countries to more than 20% in others and that variations would seem to stem from differences in how individual countries define a special educational need and the data set used.

The Report acknowledged that a special education need prevalence does not necessarily imply additional resources are required in all cases and in particular, highlighted the necessity for greater discussion about how data is collected on children with special educational needs in the Irish education system.

Categorisation of special needs

Special needs can be categorised as high-incidence or low-incidence. High-incidence, or less severe, more commonly occurring special needs, means pupils with mild general disabilities, mild general learning disabilities and/or specific learning disabilities.

Low-incidence are generally those which occur less frequently. These include pupils with a significant physical or sensory impairment, moderate, severe or profound general learning disabilities, severe emotional disturbance and/or behavioural problems, specific speech and language disorders, assessed syndrome, multiple disabilities.

Growth in Special Education costs

Special educational needs provision currently amount to €1.68bn (2017), an estimated 18.9% of the Department of Education’s gross current allocation, having increased from a level of €1.22bn in 2011, an increase of approximately 38%. In the thirteen year period since 2004, expenditure on special educational needs has increased by almost 260% from a total cost of €468m in 2004.

The majority (€1,487m, some 88%) of special education expenditure relates to pay, with additional teacher pay estimated at €1,022m, (61% of total) and special needs assistants at €464m (27% of total). Teachers pay includes provision for resource teachers, teachers in special classes and special schools and teachers allocated under the general allocation model.

Figure 1: Breakdown of Expenditure on Special Education Needs, 2011 -2017

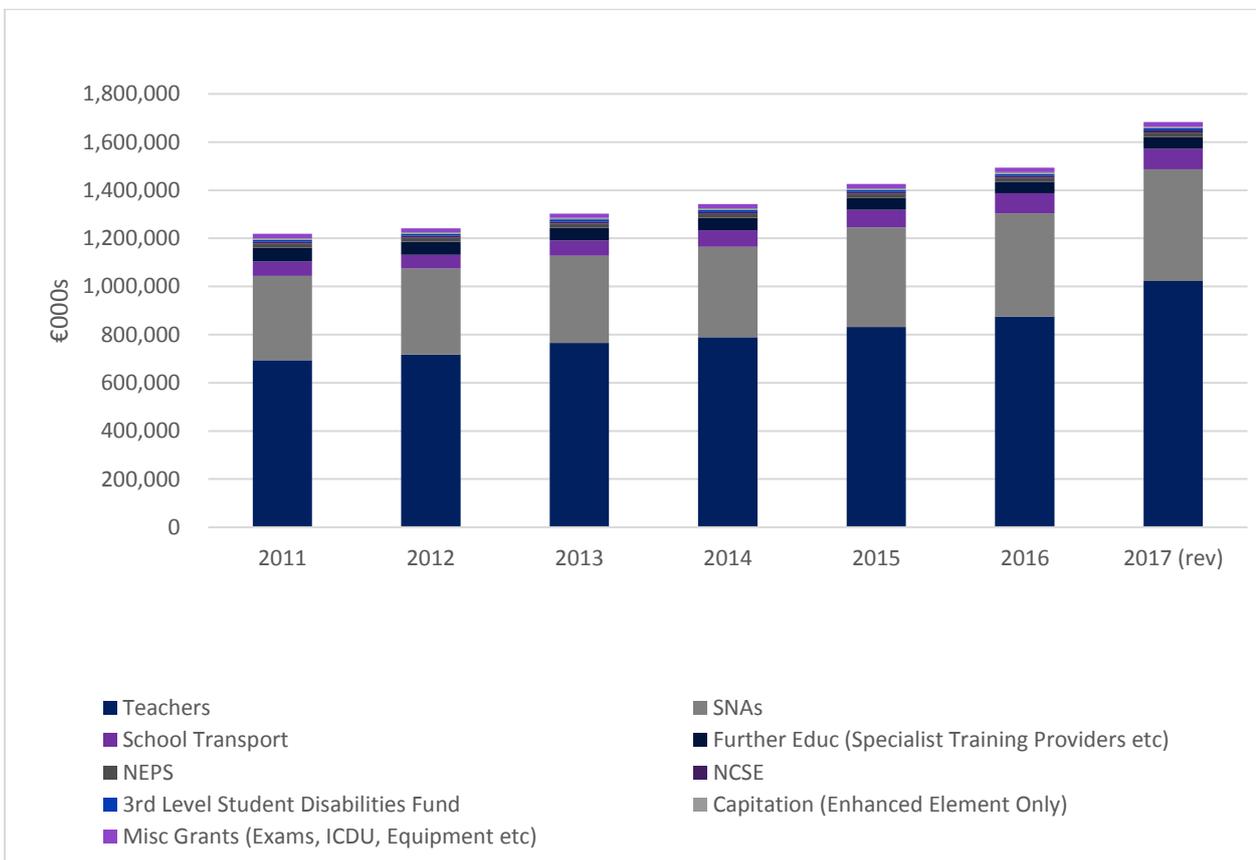


Table 1: Summary table of the expenditure changes between 2011 and 2017

Expenditure provision	2011	2017	Increase € (%)
	€m	€m	
Special education total	1,219	1,684	465 (38%)
Special Education Teachers	694	1,022	328 (47%)
SNAs	350	464	114 (33%)
School Transport	60	85	25 (41%)
Further education (Specialist Training Provider etc)	56	50	-6 (-12%)
National Educations Psychological Services	17.8	18.4	0.62 (3.5%)
National Council of Special Education	8.2	8.8	0.65(8%)
Student Support - Third level Disabilities Fund	7.7	8	0.30 (4%)
Capitation (Enhanced element only)	6.4	7.6	1.2 (19%)
Miscellaneous Grants (Exams, ICDU, Equipment,	18.4	19.9	1.5 (8%)
Gross Current Education Expenditure (incl NTF)	8,606	8,893	287 (3%)
Gross Voted Government Current Expenditure	51,800	53,500	1,700 (3%)

3. Main components of Special Education

New special education teaching allocation / Resource teachers

This section of the paper provides an overview of changes in resource teacher provision since 2011 leading to the Government decision to implement the new model from September 2017.

Teaching supports provision up to 2016/17

Up to 2016/17, additional teaching support has been provided for pupils with special educational needs through the allocation of resource teacher support by the NCSE and through the General Allocation Model.

The Department of Education and Skills provides for some 12,500 resource and learning support teachers which are allocated annually to mainstream schools to support pupils with special educational needs. An estimated 7,500 resource teacher posts are allocated by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) in response to applications from schools in respect of children with diagnosed conditions and 5,050 posts through the GAM/EAL. Resource teachers provide additional teaching capacity and are currently allocated on a teaching hour's basis to schools on behalf of individual pupils with low-incidence special needs.

Table 2 below sets out the various categories of low-incidence disabilities and the recommended level of resource teaching support in respect of each category. These allocations are guided by the Report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC Report) 1993. From September 2017, a new special education teaching model will apply, which is not linked to diagnosis, providing a single unified allocation of special education support teaching based on individual schools educational profiles, providing a more equitable and immediate form of support.

Table 2: categories of low-incidence disabilities and the recommended level of resource teaching support in respect of each category.

Low-incidence disabilities	Hours of Resource Teacher support per week
Physical disability	3
Hearing impairment	4
Visual impairment	3.5
Emotional disturbance	3.5
Severe emotional disturbance	5
Moderate General learning disability	3.5
Severe/profound general learning disability	5
Autism/autistic spectrum disorders	5

Specific Speech and language disorder	4
Assessed syndrome in conjunction with one of the above low-incidence disabilities	3-5 taking into account the pupil's special educational needs including level of general learning disability
Multiple disabilities	5

The number of pupils being assessed as qualifying for low-incidence support has grown considerably in recent years.

Table 3: annual growth in resource teacher demand and provision

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Resource teachers (cap)	5,265	5,265	5,745	6,225	6,852	7,452
Annual change		0%	9%	8%	10%	9%
Pupil numbers	29,426	32,480	35,763	38,414	43,600	47,066
Annual change		10.6%	9.56%	9%	11%	8%
Cost €	316m	316m	343m	372m	409m	447m
Annual change		0%	8%	9%	10%	9%

Table 4 sets out the growth in the proportion of pupil numbers accessing resource teacher provision relative to total pupil population, from 3.5% in 2011/12 to 5.17% in 2016/17. The number of pupils being assessed as qualifying for low-incidence support has grown considerably in recent years, by some 10% annually, whereas the overall school population has increased by less than 2%.

Table 4: Number of Pupils accessing Resource Teacher provision

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Primary	20,138	22,271	24,104	25,647	29,200	31,536
Post-Primary	9,288	10,209	11,659	12,767	14,400	15,530
Total pupils accessing resource teaching hours	29,426	32,480	35,763	38,414	43,600	47,066
Total pupil population	838,977	853,745	869,492	883,903	898,930	910,904
% of pupils accessing resource teaching hours relative to total pupils population	3.5	3.80	4.11	4.35	4.85	5.17

The remaining 5,050 posts are allocated to schools by the Department under the primary General Allocation Model (GAM/EAL), for children with milder levels of need, and under the post-primary learning support scheme. The GAM provides additional teaching resources to assist schools in making appropriate provision for pupils with learning difficulties and special educational needs from high-incidence disabilities. Since 2012/13, it also includes provision for schools to provide additional teaching support for literacy arising from English language needs.

There has been considerable growth in the provision of teacher support for pupils with special educational needs in the period 2011 to 2017. During that time frame, the number of resource teacher posts has increased from 5,265 in 2011/12 to 7,429 in 2016/17, an increase of around 41%, while the number of GAM posts has increased from 4,475 in 2011/12 to 5,072 in 2016/17, an estimated increase of 13%. At the same time, the number of pupils accessing resource teaching hours has increased from 29,426 in 2011/12 to 47,066 in 2016/17, an estimated increase of 60%.

Resource teacher and learner support teacher allocations combined increased by 28% in the period 2011/12 to 2016/17. From September 2017, 900 additional posts are being allocated to support the implementation of the new special education teaching allocation model, an estimated 38% growth in the period from 2011/12 to 2017/18.

Table 5: ratio of learning support teachers and resource teachers combined, to the general mainstream school pupil population

School Year	GAM posts	Resource teacher posts related to diagnosis	TOTAL	School Population	Ratio
2011/12	4475	5265	9,740	838,997	86:01
2012/13	4863	5265	10,128	853,745	84:01
2013/14	4882	5721	10,603	869,492	82:01
2014/15	4954	6203	11,157	883,903	79:01
2015/16	5015	6821	11,836	898,930	76:01
2016/17	5072	7429	12,501	910,904	73:01
2017/18	n/a	n/a	13,400	923,852estd.	69:01

New Special Education teaching model

The NCSE reported in 2013⁶ that the current allocation model is not the best way to allocate resources to schools as the learning needs of pupils within particular categories can vary greatly. It also found that the GAM used to allocate learning support teachers is inequitable as it takes little account of the differing needs of different primary schools as allocations are made on the basis of the number of mainstream teachers in each school.

It has been acknowledged internationally that there are always risks associated with schemes that are diagnosis driven and that children can be diagnosed as having a special educational need for resource allocations purposes rather than such a diagnosis being required for health reasons.

In January 2017, Government approved a proposal from the Minister for Education and Skills for the introduction of a new model for allocating additional teaching resources to schools to support children with special educational needs, from September 2017, as recommended by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).

The removal of the requirement for a diagnosis will somewhat diminish the incidence of inappropriate diagnosis and the unnecessary labelling of children⁷. While the new special education teaching allocation model addresses these issues in relation to resource teacher provision, a medical diagnosis remains a requirement for SNA⁸ and school transport provision.

The new model will see the NCSE resource teacher and learning support schemes, under the General Allocation Model / English as an Additional Language (GAM / EAL), merge into a single unified allocation for special education teaching support to schools.

It is envisaged that the new model would lead to a more equitable and better distribution of resources. One of the advantages of the new model is that it will remove the need for a medical diagnosis. Schools will also have considerable certainty about annual allocations, more autonomy in the use of allocations, and children will not have to wait for medical assessments before supports can be accessed.

The composition of the new model will involve:

⁶ http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Supporting_14_05_13_web.pdf

⁷ <http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/debates%20authoring/DebatesWebPack.nsf/committeetakes/ESJ2016102700002?opendocument#C00200>

⁸ Eligibility for SNA provision requires both a diagnosis of disability and the identification of an assessed care need.

- a baseline component to every mainstream school to support inclusion, prevention of learning difficulties and early intervention, and
- a school educational profile component comprising elements of complex needs, standardised test scores, and social context and gender.

Cost of resource teacher provision

The cost of the resource teacher scheme has increased from €316m in 2011/12 to an estimated €447m in 2016/17. Budget 2017 provided for an additional 900 additional teaching posts to support the implementation of the new special education teaching model from September 2017. This will ensure that up to 1,000 schools will receive additional allocations, where the new model indicates additional need, and that no schools will receive an allocation of resources less than the combined allocation the school received under the GAM/EAL and NCSE resource teacher allocation in the 2016/17 school year.

It is of utmost importance that structures are put in place at an early stage to capture the necessary data to evaluate the effectiveness of the new scheme having regard to the significant amount of expenditure in this area.

Special Needs Assistants

The Special Needs Assistants (SNA) scheme is designed to provide schools with additional adult support staff to assist children with special educational needs who also have additional and significant care needs. The support can be provided in primary, post-primary and special schools settings. It is provided in order to facilitate the attendance of those pupils at school and also to minimise disruption to class or teaching time for the pupils concerned, or for their peers, and with a view to developing their independent living skills.

SNAs are allocated by the NCSE to schools annually on the basis of the assessed care needs of the children concerned rather than solely by reference to a disability categorisation. Supporting evidence from a diagnosing clinician is submitted with the application for support. Expenditure on the SNA Scheme rose by 1,287% in the period 2001 – 2017.

A child must have an assessed disability to require or qualify for access to SNA support. The care needs must be of such significance that they are in excess of what would generally be expected to be provided to a child by a teacher and must be beyond what could normally be provided for by alternative support approaches or modifications of the classroom environment or teaching approaches. The type of significant care needs required varies depending on the nature and level of the disability or the impairment that a child may have. Examples of primary care needs which would be considered significant and might require SNA support are:

- Non-nursing care needs associated with specific medical conditions (such as epileptic seizures);

- Assistance with mobility and orientation on an ongoing basis;
- Assistance with moving and lifting, operating of hoists and equipment;
- Assistance with toileting and general hygiene;
- Administration of medication where the extent of assistance required would overly disrupt normal teaching time;
- Assistance with severe communication difficulties including enabling curriculum access for pupils with physical disabilities or sensory needs and those with significant, and identified social and emotional difficulties.

SNAAs are not allocated to individual pupils but to schools as a school based resource in the same manner that teachers are allocated to schools. The provision of a quantum of support provides schools with the autonomy and flexibility to manage their allocation of SNA support in order to utilise the support to the best possible effect. It is intended to allow schools to target support to those pupils who have the greatest degree of need at any given time, recognising that this may be variable over time depending on assessed needs.

A comprehensive Value for Money Review of the SNA scheme was conducted in 2011. The Review found that the scheme was supporting schools in meeting the needs of pupils with disabilities who also have significant care needs. However, it was clear that the aim of the scheme was not fully understood nor was the allocation process generally well understood within schools and by parents. It also found evidence of an oversupply of SNA posts⁹. The Review found that the deployment of SNAs in schools had in practice moved away from the original objectives of the scheme which was to provide for children's care needs and had moved toward SNA involvement in behavioural, therapeutic, pedagogical /teaching and administrative duties. It recommended that the criteria for allocation of support should be restated and clarified for both parents and schools. Overall the review found that the SNA Scheme, in its current form, did not deliver value for money due to over-allocation of SNA posts and the resistance to suppressing SNA posts that are no longer required has increased the overall cost of the Scheme.

The review highlighted a concern that excess support may lead to an over-dependence by the student on SNA support, a loss of opportunity for the student to develop independent learning skills and an over-reliance by the class teacher on the student having such support as well as the opportunity cost of such excess support.

It is also important to ensure that a robust mechanism is in place to provide for the ongoing monitoring and review of the allocation of SNA support. It is essential that SNA posts do not remain in situ in the absence of ongoing need or in the event of students who were allocated the resources having left the school.

⁹ In its national review of SNA allocations carried out in 2009/10, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) found that 955 SNA posts were no longer required as the students to whom the posts related had left the school and 764 posts were no longer required because students had diminished care needs.

Response to Value for Money review

The Department of Education and Skills issued Circular 0030/2014¹⁰ which restated and clarified the criteria for allocation of SNA provision. The Circular also:

- sets out details of the primary care needs for which SNA support will usually be provided;
- clarifies the role of an SNA in supporting classroom teachers and resource / learning support teachers in assisting with the care needs of a child;
- details the circumstances in which SNA support will be provided for behavioural related care needs;
- clarifies the basis of allocations, that is, being time bound, made initially for a period of three years, subject to annual review and subject to a full-reassessment at the end of the three year period; and
- sets out the obligation on schools to put in place a Personal Pupil Plan (PPP) including a care plan for all pupils availing of SNA support.

The first of the full three year reassessments of the allocation as set out under the circular is due to commence at the end of the 2017/18 school year and will go some way in identifying individual pupils ongoing level of care need required.

Primary factors influencing demand for SNA support

A focused policy assessment (FPA) was conducted on the SNA scheme to ensure that the scheme continues to meet its objectives and that resources are being utilised effectively and efficiently in line with guidelines. The FPA also sought to establish a better understanding of the factors driving increased demand for SNA support.

The “Focused Policy Assessment (FPA) on Data on Special Needs Assistants¹¹” published in 2016, identified a comprehensive range of data sources to support the drivers behind the continued growth in demand for SNAs.

The findings of the review identified the primary drivers to include:

- the underlying change in the school-age population. A baby boom which peaked in 2009 is causing a wave of growth in the underlying school-age population, increasing by 7% between 2011 and 2015. This population is estimated to increase by a further 3% between 2016 and 2019.
- the increasing proportion of children who are qualifying for SNA and SEN support. The percentage of pupils accessing SNA support in primary and post-primary has increased from 2.7% in 2011/12 to 3.3% in 2015/16. Those accessing special educational needs (SEN) supports have increase from 17% of the total primary and post-primary population in 2011 to 20% in 2015.

¹⁰ http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0030_2014.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Value-For-Money-Reviews/Focused-Policy-Assessment-of-Data-on-Special-Needs-Assistants.pdf>

- the increased number of pupils with an Autism diagnosis. The principal reason behind the growth in the proportion of pupils qualifying for SNA support is the increasing proportion of children presenting with a diagnosis of ASD. During the period 2011/12 to 2015/16, the number of pupils with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) diagnosis increased by 83%. This is driving almost all of the increase in the number of pupils in special classes, in specials schools and 50% of the increase in mainstream classes. SNA support for children with ASD tends to be primarily around behaviour or communication.
- Another factor has been the increasing number of children with ASD starting school earlier, including a growing number in the early intervention classes¹². Children with ASD may attend primary school from the age of three years within the context of an early intervention class. The number of children attending these classes increased from under 200 in 2011 to over 600 in 2015 (200% increase) while during the same period, early intervention classes increased from 34 to 127, an increase of around 273%.

Table 6 indicates the number of pupils in mainstream education with access to SNA support between the school years 2011/12 and 2015/16, and breakdown by special educational needs category. While the numbers specifically relate to the level of access to SNA support, the disability/care need categorisation can be illustrative of the distribution of disability types across mainstream education.

¹² Extract from DES statement to Joint Committee of Education and Skills 27 October 2016: International Studies have placed prevalence rates in the past at about 1% of the population. However, evidence gathered to support the development of the current [resource teacher allocation] policy advise indicates that prevalence rates are significantly higher than that and the NCSE has advised that for planning purposes, the Department should now consider a prevalence rate of 1.55% or one child in every 65.

Table 6: Number of pupils in mainstream education with access to SNA support

Disability type - Primary & Post-Primary (Mainstream Students)	2011/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	2011/12-15/16 change	% Change: 2011/2012 - 2015/2016
Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders	2,742	3,178	3,574	4,429	5,041	2,299	84%
Multiple Disabilities	1,033	1,192	1,276	1,884	2,067	1,034	100%
No Disability ¹³	683	879	1,063	1,097	1,409	726	106%
Physical Disability	1,912	2,084	2,123	2,063	2,222	310	16%
Moderate GLD	430	458	466	547	613	183	43%
Emotional / Behavioural Disturbance	2,762	2,838	2,807	2,686	2,942	180	7%
Hearing Impairment	280	301	329	359	401	121	43%
Assessed Syndrome	377	431	468	396	452	75	20%
Visual Impairment	289	304	313	342	360	71	25%
Specific Speech and Language Disorder	320	347	347	296	374	54	17%
Severe Emotional / Behavioural Disturbance	666	713	699	712	708	42	6%
Severe/Profound GLD	21	25	22	26	31	10	48%
Specific Learning Disability	31	19	10	10	11	-20	-65%
Borderline and Mild GLD	604	499	410	254	243	-361	-60%
Total	12,150	13,268	13,907	15,101	16,874	4,724	39%

The FPA identified a potential additional cost of between €47m and €183m arising over the next four years and considered it timely to conduct a review be undertaken to identify the most appropriate form of support options to provide better outcomes for pupils with special education needs having regard to the significant amount of expenditure in this area.

The FPA also recommended that the NCSE develop its data capturing capacity to record data on the outcomes of the SENO reviews at a school level and on the intensity of the pupils care needs requiring access to SNA support. Data relating to the application process for SNA support for pupils is retained on the NCSE Special Education Administration System (SEAS). However, the data currently does not differentiate between the

¹³ The 'No Disability' means that the pupil may have a special educational need or condition which does not fall within the categories of disability as set out in DES Circular 02/05, but may be suffering from a medical condition, the extent of which requires the pupil to be supported by SNA support in school in accordance with the Circular. The disability may also be sometimes caused by a medical condition which may be temporary, such as arising from accident, as opposed to an enduring condition which is categorised by a defined disability.

nature of the pupil's disability and the level of SNA care required. To have further insight into the impact of SNA support, the FPA proposed that procedural changes be introduced to allow some level of differentiation of SNA supports, for example, between low level and high level needs. The NCSE has begun making modifications to its system and further work is ongoing. It is essential to have further insight into the level of support required in order to identify the appropriate form and level of care needs required.

Comprehensive review of the Special Needs Assistants scheme

The SNA FPA recommended that a comprehensive review of the SNA scheme should be carried out to seek to identify the most appropriate form of support options to provide better outcomes for students with special educational needs, having regard to the significant amount of State investment in this area.

The comprehensive review of the SNA scheme is being led by the NCSE, in consultation with other relevant Departments and State Agencies, including the National Disability Authority (NDA). The final report is expected to be completed early 2018. It is anticipated that the report will assist in informing the allocations process for 2018/19.

The terms of reference require the review to:

- identify and recommend how in the future the additional care needs of pupils over and above those needs that could reasonably be expected to be managed by teaching staff should be met, and,
- recommend the most appropriate form of support options to provide better outcomes for pupils with Special Educational Needs who have additional care needs, having regard to the significant amount of State investment in this area.

It is expected that the review will, *inter alia*, examine whether the SNA scheme in its current form continues to meet its purpose, evaluate the role of professional reports in providing a robust basis for the allocation of additional care supports under the scheme, conduct a detailed analysis of the current allocation and distribution of SNAs focussing on what support is being given, to whom and why, and define and examine outcomes of pupils under current arrangements, taking into account the findings of the Altered Provision Pilot Project.

Altered Provision Pilot Project

The Altered Provision Pilot Project (APP) was developed in 2013, following consideration of the review of SNAs (2011) and the 2013 NCSE policy advice paper "*Supporting Students and Special Education Needs in Schools*", which noted that pupils with an emotional and behavioural disorder may have care needs best met through teaching skills in self-regulation of behaviour. It was also noted that the access to SNA support is not always desirable for post-primary pupils unless absolutely essential as it can impede independence and socialisation needs. The NCSE paper recommended that rather than care support, more post-primary aged pupils with

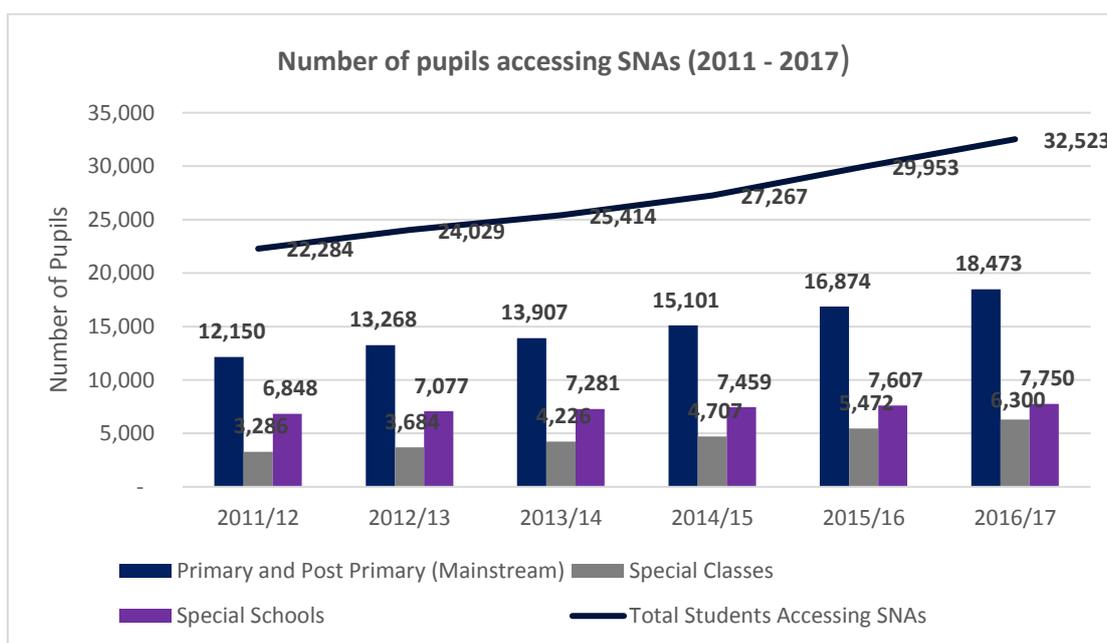
special educational needs in mainstream schools require further supplementary teaching support to bring about improved educational outcomes by increasing engagement, improving literacy and numeracy skills and assisting the self-regulation of behaviour.

A pilot of the APP model was delivered across fifteen post-primary schools over a three year period involving the appointment of a teacher rather than an SNA on a “cost equal” basis” i.e. 0.5 teacher for 1 SNA , to support pupils with emotional behavioural difficulties / disabilities (EBD). The rationale for the project was that pupils with EBD require more additional teaching in the self-management of behaviour from qualified teachers, rather than the care support provided by an SNA. NCSE data indicated that pupils with EBDs were identified as the largest category of need in receipt of SNA support at post-primary level, with little research on the learning experience and outcomes for learners in receipt of such support. The NCSE commissioned a review to be conducted on the APP pilot which is currently being finalised. The findings will be considered in the comprehensive review of the SNA scheme underway.

Growth in pupils accessing SNA provision

SNA provision has increased in line with the number of pupils being diagnosed as having significant care needs requesting care need support. Figure 2 illustrates the growth in the numbers of pupils accessing SNAs. Between 2011/12 and 2016/17, the total number of pupils accessing SNAs has increased 46%, from 22,284 in 2011/12 (2.7% of overall school population) to 32,523 in 2016/17 (3.6% of overall school population).

Figure 2: Number of pupils accessing SNAs



Growth in SNA provision

The majority of SNA support is allocated to primary schools. Overall, in the period between 2011 and 2017, SNA provision allocated to primary schools has increased 31%, secondary / community and comprehensive level provision has increased an estimated 31%, while SNA provision for ETBs has increased 53%. Overall, the cost of the scheme has increased from €350m in 2011 to €464m in 2017, an increase of €114m (33%).

Table 7: Numbers of SNAs and pupils for each of the years 2011/12 to 2016/17

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
SNAs (cap)	10,575	10,575	10,745	11,330	12,040	13,015
Annual Change		0%	1.6%	5.4%	6.3%	8.1%
Number of pupils	22,284	24,029	25,414	27,267	29,953	32,523
Annual Change		7.8%	5.8%	7.3%	9.9%	8.6%

Special schools and special classes

The policy of the Department of Education and Skills is that children with special education needs should be included, where possible and appropriate, in mainstream placements with additional supports provided. In circumstances where children with special needs require more specialised interventions, it may be in the best interest of the child to receive his/her education in a special class in mainstream schools or in a special school.

Individual assessments for children with special educational needs will identify the appropriate placement options for children based on the child's level of needs. The assessment should be used to identify whether a child should be in mainstream, special class or special school. The key consideration is the disability category as set out in Special Education Review Committee (SERC) report and the level of severity of special needs.

Special classes and special schools have smaller class sizes than standard mainstream classes and may also be given a baseline allocation of SNA support. Additional SNA support over and above the baseline allocation may also be approved by the NCSE in circumstances where there are children with significant care needs over and above that generally. Staffing arrangements are on the basis of the ratios (Table 8) recommended by the Report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) 1993. More recently, the NCSE policy advice of 2013 "Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools" recommended that staffing arrangements for special schools and classes should continue at that level.

Table 8: SERC Report 1993 – staffing ratio of each disability category

Type of special class/school	Pupil Teacher ratio	Class-SNA ratio
Visual Impairment	8:1	4:1
Hearing Impairment	7:1	4:1
Profoundly Deaf	6:1	2:1
Mild General Learning Disability (GLD)	11:1	4:1
Moderate General Learning Disability	8:1	2:1
Severe/profound GLD	6:1	1:2
Emotional Disturbance	8:1	4:1
Severe emotional disturbance	6:1	1:1
Physical disability	10:1	1:1
Speech & language Disorder	7:1	3:1
Specific learning Disability	9:1	No automatic allocation
Autism/autistic spectrum disorder	6:1	1:2
Multiple disabilities	6:1	1:1

The number of teachers in special classes in primary & post-primary schools has risen from 601 to 1,307 in the period 2011 to 2017 an increase of 117%, while the number of pupils attending special classes has risen from 3,286 to 6,696, an increase of 95% in the same period. The increase in autism prevalence is the main driver of growth in special class numbers.

Figure 3: Teacher and Pupil numbers in primary special classes

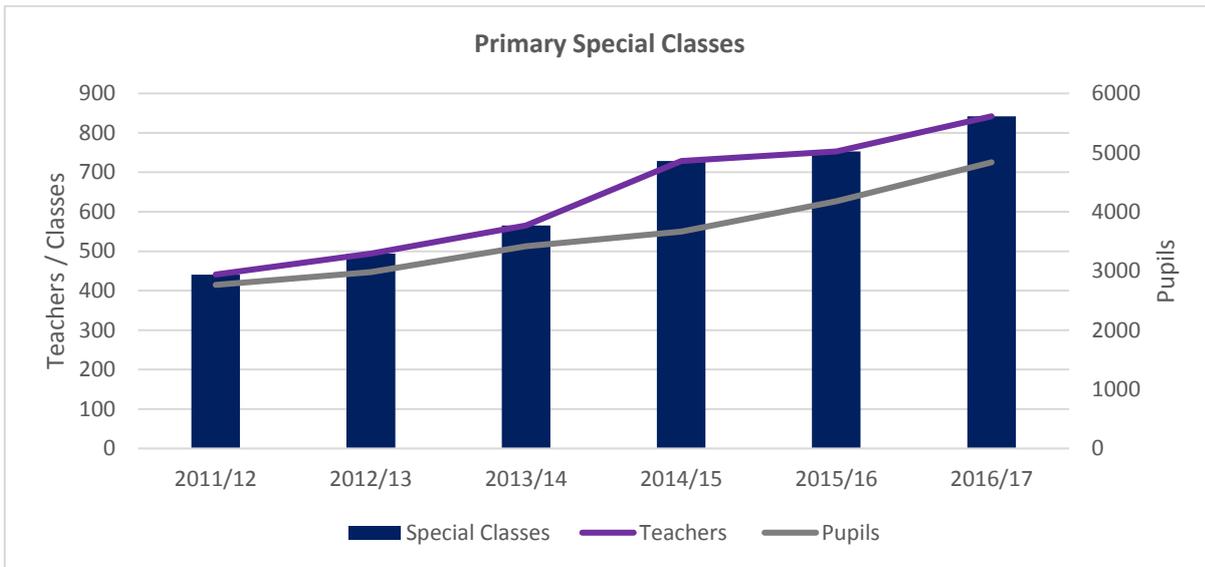
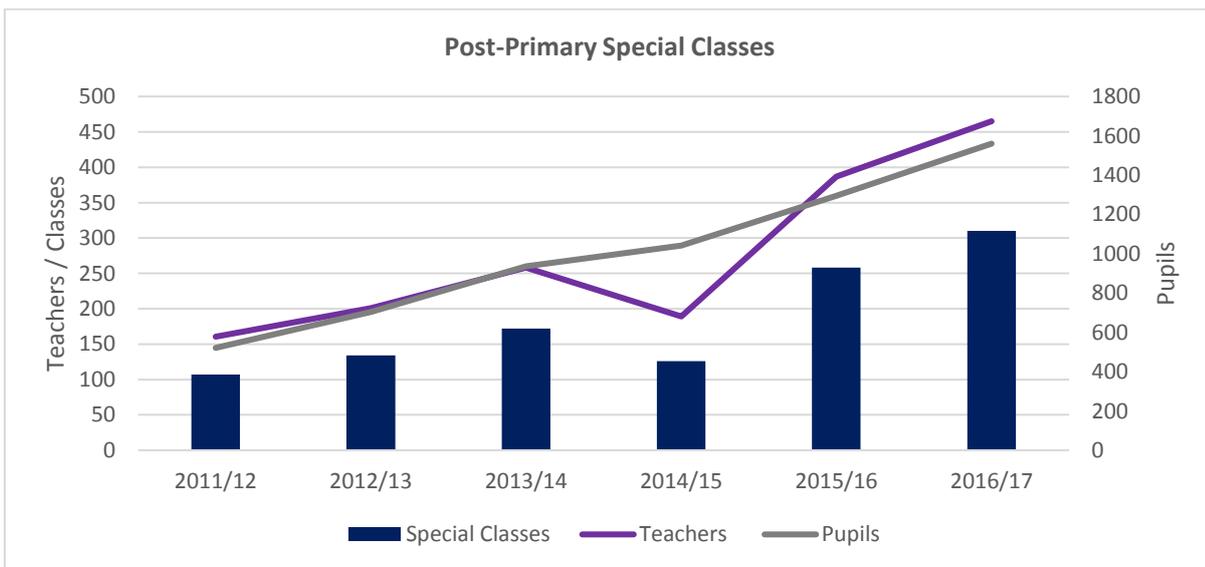


Figure 4: Teacher and Pupil numbers in post- primary special classes



Overall the number of special classes in primary and post-primary increased from 548 to 1152, an increase of 110%.

The number of pupils per SNA post in special schools has remained stable over the six years. During this period, the ratio in special classes has reduced somewhat while the ratio has increased in mainstream schools. This pattern reflects the growth in the number of special classes for students with autism relative to other types of special class. Special classes for autism are allocated two SNA posts per class whereas other special classes might have one SNA (Table 7). It may also reflect the greater complexity of care needs to be found in special classes.

The number of special schools has remained static at 125, with a decrease of one in 2016 when two schools for the deaf amalgamated. Population growth has driven modest growth in special schools. The number of pupils attending special schools has increased from 6,848 in 2011/12 to an estimated 7,750 in 2016/17, an increase of 13%. At the same time, the number of teachers increased from 1,144 to 1,427, an increase of 25%¹⁴.

Up to the 2010/11 school year, teaching staff were allocated to special schools based on the schools disability designation. During the Value for Money Review of the SNA Scheme, it emerged that many special schools enrol students from disability categories other than from those provided for by their existing school designations. Many schools have expanded their remit to enrol pupils with a wide range of special educational needs, to meet the needs of their communities.

From the 2012/13 school year, teaching staff allocated to special schools is based on their actual current pupil profiles and the disability category of each pupil, as opposed to primarily by school designation, on the basis that teaching staff levels and pupil/teacher ratios should reflect the complexity of need that exists within individual special schools and should not be solely determined by a special school's designation.

Between 2011 and 2017, of the overall school population, the proportion of pupils educated in special schools has remained constant at around 0.85% and the percentage in special classes has increased from 0.39% to 0.61% in the same period.

Role of Inspectorate in relation to Special Education

The Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate is responsible for the evaluation of primary and post-primary schools and centres for education. Inspectors also provide advice on a range of education issues to school communities, policy makers in the Department and to the wider educational system.

The Inspectorates carries out a range of different types of inspections in schools and centres for education, including the evaluation of provision for pupils with special educational needs. The evaluation focusses on the learning outcomes of pupils with special educational needs and the use of resources by schools to improve outcomes for these pupils. As part of the evaluation, inspectors visit both mainstream and special classes and special schools, engage with pupils, review their work, files, individual plans and assessment data and administer parent questionnaires.

Where significant issues are identified in relation to provision for pupils with special educational needs, the matter may be referred to Special Education section or, where serious management or governance issues are

¹⁴In 2011/12, 13 ABA Autism Pilot Schools were re designated as Special Schools. Most of the additional posts arise because the teachers in these schools were re designated as Special School teachers. These therefore were not new posts. Furthermore, all classes in these schools had a PTR of 6:1 which affected the overall efficiency rate of PTR across the entire Special School sector (Table 8).

identified, they may be referred to the Department's School Improvement Group who will determine the actions to be taken to address shortcomings in teaching, learning, leadership and management in schools and monitors progress over a period of time. The issue may be referred to the NCSE if relevant to its remit.

In reviews conducted in 2002, 2003 the Inspectorate found that there was an over-allocation of SNAs in the schools reviewed, and expressed concerns that the greater availability of resources in recent years may have led to an over-identification of students with special educational needs.

The inspection model does not provide for any specific interaction between the Inspectorate and the NCSE. There may be a case for the Inspectorate to have a clearer, more defined role in monitoring and evaluating special education expenditure.

4. Other categories of Special Education Support

This part of the paper will look at each of the other areas of special educational needs expenditure, set out the rationale of each of these schemes and the drivers of the expenditure.

School Transport

The objective of the school transport scheme is to provide transport to primary and second level schools for children who reside a significant distance (3.2km for primary and 4.8km post-primary) from their school and for children with special education needs arising from a diagnosed disability. Under the terms of the scheme, children with special educational needs are eligible for transport where they have special educational needs arising from a diagnosed disability in accordance with the designation of high and low incidence disability set out in the Department of Education and Skill's Circular 02/15 and are attending the nearest recognised school that is or that can be resourced to meet their special educational needs. Eligible children are exempt from school transport charges.

Eligibility is determined following consultation with the NCSE through its network of Special Education Needs Organisers (SENO). Decisions around transport eligibility is based on the prevailing circumstances at the time of enrolment and eligible pupils retain eligibility while then remain enrolled in the special school / special class or unit.

School transport for special education needs purposes currently (2017) costs about €85m, an estimated 47% of the total cost of school transport, while pupils with special educational needs account for about 9% of the overall numbers participating in the scheme.

The overall number of pupils availing of the school transport scheme has increased from 113,015 to 115,653, an increase of 2.3%. The number of pupils with special educational needs availing of school transport increased from 8,283 to 10,625 in the same timeframe, an increase of 28%.

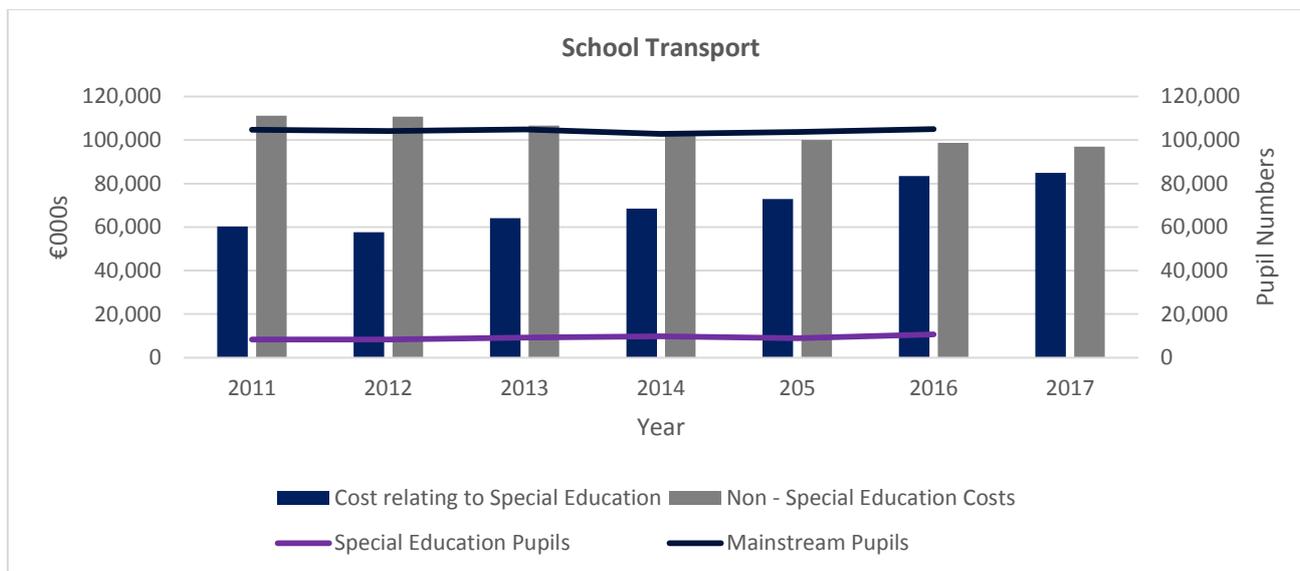
The continued growth in provision of transport for children with special educational needs is a significant reason behind the cost increase of school transport provision. The main drivers of the increases in expenditure relating to the special education needs element of school transport are:

- an increase in the number of escorts required to accompany children with special educational needs whose care needs and safety are such as to require the support of an escort. Expenditure in this area has increased from €15m in 2011 to almost €23m in 2016. Approximately 1,500 escorts are employed on school transport services; and
- an increase in the number of children requiring an individual service i.e. taxis. Almost €25m is currently being spent on taxi services for children with special educational needs, increasing from €14m in 2011, a 79% increase. For comparative purposes, in 2016, almost 1,500 additional pupils with special educational needs were accommodated on services at a cost of €10m compared with 950 additional pupils on the general scheme at a cost of €1.6m.

The Value for Money Review of the School Transport Scheme, published in 2011, found that the unit cost of transporting mainstream pupils was in the region of €1,020 (primary) and €958 (post-primary) while the unit cost of pupils with special educational needs was estimated at €7,034 excluding escorts or €9,087 including escorts. It also recommended that charge be put in place for students with special needs where the children are not holders of medical cards and that this charge would be €200 per primary or €300 per post-primary special needs child to be paid in two instalments in the same way as the primary or post-primary charge. It would be useful to have further insight into current allocations and unit costs in order to inform the effectiveness and efficiency of the scheme.

In the provision of necessary school transport, it is important to ensure the appropriate balance between providing transport to children and meeting the overarching objective that pupils with special needs participate in an inclusive environment with those who do not have such needs, foster independence and engage in the social activities. Assessment of need should be considered and reviewed against that backdrop on an annual basis.

Figure 5: overview of all allocations under the school transport scheme from 2011 to 2017



Specialist Training Providers in the Further Education sector

Specialist Training Providers are funded through the National Training Fund (NTF) as part of the allocation to SOLAS. The Specialist Training Providers (STPs) programme is specifically aimed at people with a disability. Education Training Boards (ETBs) contract with a number of Specialist Training Providers to deliver training courses to people with disabilities who require more intensive support than would be available in non-specialist training provision. NLN (National Learning Network) is the largest provider delivering specialist training courses within this programme category, delivering an estimated 80% of the total STP provision.

The programme structure provides a range of specialist courses which are available at two levels of training, Introductory Skills Training (IST) and Skill Specific Training (SST). These training courses are accredited and lead to awards at levels 3-5 on the National Framework of Qualifications. These programmes provided training to 3,687 beneficiaries in 2016 of which 2,104 were new starters. The training provided is intended to provide the learner with skills, knowledge and competencies that will increase employment and career prospects as well as facilitate progression to further education, training and employment.

Entry to specialist training is open to all persons with disabilities over 16 years of age. A training allowance is paid in lieu of social welfare entitlement or participants retain their social welfare only. The duration on the programme can vary and typically is between one to two years.

An annual trainer fee of €14,956 is paid by the relevant ETB to the relevant STP Service Provider for each participant trained. Expenditure was an estimated €55m in 2011 and reduced to €48m in 2017, a reduction of 10%, while the number of participants varied between an estimated 3,000 and 3,600 in that period.

Table 9: cost of Specialist Training Providers and number of beneficiaries, 2011 to 2017

Specialist Training Providers	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Cost (€000s)	54,592	52,262	51,412	50,070	47,489	46,392	48,000
Number of Beneficiaries	3,655	2,996	2,996	3,889	3,124	3,687	Not available

National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

The overall objective of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) is to provide a comprehensive educational psychology service to all schools. NEPS psychologists work with both primary and post-primary schools and are concerned with learning, behavioural, social and emotional development. NEPS prioritises support for learners at risk of educational disadvantage and those with special educational needs. They work in partnership with teachers, parents and pupils in identifying educational needs and offer a range of services aimed at meeting these needs and maximising positive outcomes for learners.

Since 2011, pupil demographics have risen consistently in primary and post-primary schools while NEPS psychologist numbers have remained static or indeed lowered.

Overall expenditure on NEPS has decreased from €17.7m in 2011 to €16.8m in 2016, a reduction of 5%, while the number of NEPS decreased from 166 to 162 in that period. It is projected to increase to €18.3m in 2017 with the appointment of ten new NEPS psychologists in Q2 2017.

National Council for Special Education

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 service is delivered through the national network of Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENO) who interact with parents and schools and liaise with the HSE in providing resources to support children with special educational needs. A key aim of the NCSE is to progressively improve the co-ordination between the education and health sectors in providing supports for children with special educational needs. Costs relating to the provision has remained relatively stable since 2011, an estimated €8m, increasing to €8.8m in 2017.

National Inclusion Support Service

From March 2017, a new Inclusion Support Service to assist schools in supporting children with special educational needs has been established within the National Council for Special Education. This service will

include the Special Education Support Service (SESS), the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) and the Visiting Teacher Service for deaf/hard of hearing and blind/visually impaired pupils.

The decision to establish this service within the NCSE was taken based on a recommendation contained in the NCSE Working Group Report on a Proposed New Model for Allocating Teaching Resources for Pupils with Special Educational Needs [\[inset link\]](#) which noted that the existing advisory and intervention supports which are currently available to schools are provided by a number of different bodies and organisations. The report highlighted the need to ensure cohesion across service provision and recommended that the existing support services for pupils with special educational needs should be combined into one unified support service for schools.

Enhanced capitation

Capitation grants are paid towards the day to day running costs of schools, for example, heating, cleaning, lighting, maintenance of school premises and grounds and provision of teaching materials and resources.

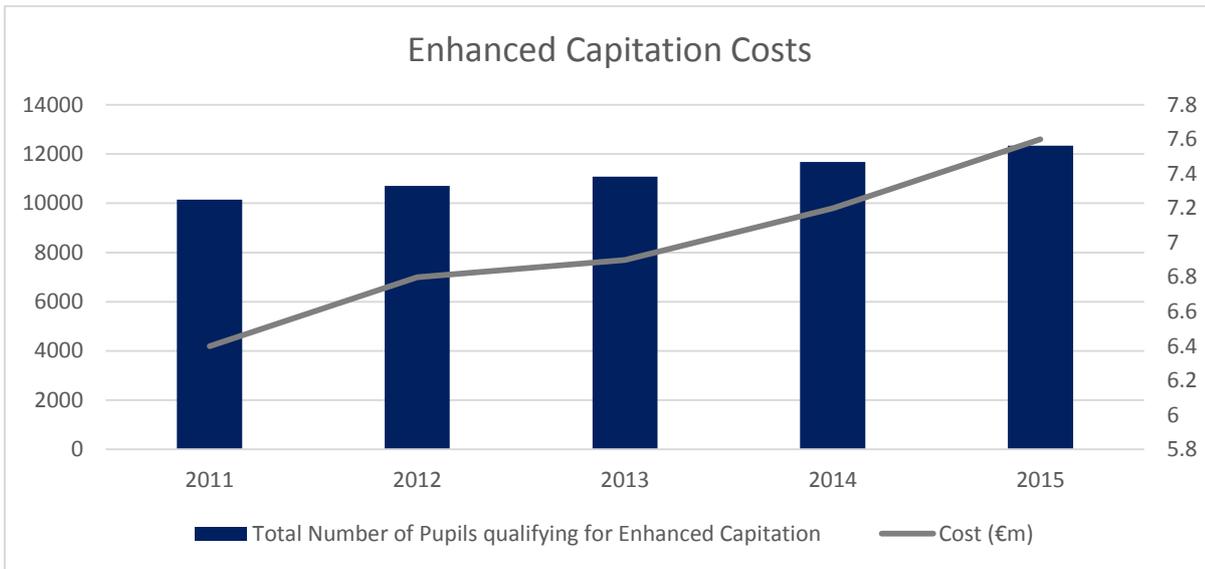
Enhanced capitation, based on disability categories, is paid to special and mainstream schools with special classes ¹⁵to assist them with the extra costs associated with the running costs of classrooms, with a small number of pupils, operating specialist provision.

Overall expenditure on capitation (enhanced and mainstream) has increased 4% from €384m in 2011 to €400m in 2016.

Enhanced capitation (net of mainstream) is paid in respect of an estimated 1.4% of the overall school population. Expenditure increased from €6.4m in 2011 to €7.6m in 2015, an increase of 19%. While the number of eligible pupils increased from 10,150 pupils in 2011 to 12,341 pupils in 2015, an increase of 22%, there were reductions in the enhanced capitation rates.

¹⁵ See The Department of Education Circular 0028/2016 for current rates applicable.

Figure 6: Enhancement capitation net of mainstream rate



Other support services

There are a range of other valuable support services and structures in place aiming to complement the necessary supports for pupils with special educational needs.

RACE scheme

The ‘Reasonable Accommodation in the Certificate Exams’ (RACE) Scheme provides assistance to those with special educational needs taking part in State exams. Specialist equipment and all other accommodations are funded under this scheme. The scheme costs an estimated €6.2m in 2011 which decreased to €5.7m in 2016. The number of eligible pupils increased from an estimated 14,300 to 16,800 in the same period.

Fund for students with disabilities

The European Social Fund (ESF) co-funded Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) provides funding to support further and higher education institutions to ensure the successful participation of students with disabilities. Eligible students can receive assistance from the Fund for additional tuition/learning support, the purchase of assistive technologies, targeted transport services, sign language assistance/interpreters and personal assistants, from PLC level up to doctoral level. The FSD is managed by the HEA on behalf of the DES.

Equipment grant

Provision under this scheme is made for 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.

The purpose of this scheme is to provide grant support 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 for special educational needs.

The equipment provided for under this scheme 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.

Special Education Equipment

A grant is available to primary and post-primary schools to fund the purchase of equipment for education purposes. The scheme applies to pupils with physical or mental disabilities. The level of grant available is €6,500 for a special needs class and an additional €7,000 for equipment for departmentally approved multi-sensory rooms. A grant may also be provided for specific items such as chairs, tables etc.

Braille Production Unit

A grant is paid to the National Braille Production (NBP), which provides access to educational materials for children with a visual impairment by transcriptions in a range of formats: Braille; tactile diagrams, Large Print and text-only files on computer disks. NBP is part of the services provided by Child vision, the National Education Centre for Blind Children.

Funding is also provided in respect of in-career training relating to special education (€4m) for some 19,000 teachers, to the Irish Deaf Society for literacy provision and also in respect of Guidance Counselling and Psychological Services.

Summary of main changes

Special educational needs provision currently costs about €1.68bn (2017), having increased from a level of €1.22bn in 2011, an increase of about 38%.

Between 2011/12 and 2016/17:

- resource teacher provision increased from 5,265 to 7,429, (41%), whereas pupils accessing resource teaching hours increased from 29,426 to 47,066 (60%);
- SNA posts increased from 10,462 to 12,806 (22%), while the number of pupils accessing SNA support increased from 22,284 to 32,523 (46%);

- the combined number of teachers in the primary and post-primary sectors in special classes increased from 602 to 1,307 (117%) whereas the number of pupils increased from 3,266 to 6,396 (96%);
- In comparison, teachers in general mainstream education increased from 55,825 to 64,260 (15%) while pupil numbers increased from 838,997 to 910,904 (8.6%);
- the continued growth in provision for children with special educational needs is the main cost driver behind the increase in overall school transport provision, in particular the increase (53% from €15m to €23m) in the number of escorts required and the number of children requiring an individual taxi service (79% from €14m to €25m).

5. Conclusion / key findings

There has been significant growth in expenditure relating to special education provision in recent years, increasing by some 38% since 2011, from some €1.22bn to an overall €1.68bn in 2017, representing nearly 18.9% of the Department's gross current allocation. The majority (€1,487m, 88%) of special education expenditure relates to pay, with additional teacher pay estimated at €1,022m, (61%) and special needs assistants pay at €464m (27%). Special education teachers pay includes provision for resource teachers, teachers in special classes and special schools and teachers allocated under the general allocation model.

A significant proportion of increases over the years can be attributable to the diagnostic nature of resource teacher provision (41%) and special needs assistants (22%), and the increases in special classes established (110%). At the same time, there has been little change in the number of special schools.

Such demand has been unpredictable and difficult to manage in the context of limited resources and the aim of ensuring that the educational needs of children with special educational needs continue to be met alongside their peers at primary and post-primary level, where appropriate and possible.

Recent significant reforms to special education provision, including the development of new special education teaching model, from September 2017, will provide a better, fairer and more equitable means of allocating the very considerable resources which are provided to schools to support pupils with special educational needs. The new model will also bring considerable certainty to schools about their annual allocations and children will no longer be dependent on the provision of a medical assessments before supports can be accessed. Moving from a scheme which provided additional resources for pupils with low incidence disabilities, based on assessments of disability diagnosis, to a profiled allocation model for schools, will provide a more sustainable basis for planning and management of these resources. The incidence of inappropriate

diagnosis for resource purposes and the unnecessary labelling of children¹⁶ will also be eliminated. However, while the risk of inappropriate diagnosis is not substantial for the SNA scheme given that the scheme requires both a diagnosis of disability and the identification of an assessed care need, the risk remains for school transport provision purposes.

It is important that the operation of the new model be reviewed on an ongoing basis and revised as appropriate to ensure it is effectively meeting its aims and also restraining the unsustainable growth in demand for additional resources in this area.

In relation to SNA provision, the scheme was borne of “care needs” in the first instance. The *“Focused Policy Assessment on Data related to Special Needs Assistants”* (2016) identified the primary drivers behind the increases in demand for SNA provision to include, the underlying change in the school age population, the increasing proportion of children who are qualifying for SNA and special educational needs supports, and in particular, the increasing number of pupils presenting with an autism diagnosis. During the period 2011/12 to 2015/16, the number of pupils with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) diagnosis, increased by 83%.

An autism diagnosis, has been identified as driving almost all of the increase in the number of pupils in special classes, in special schools and 50% of the increase in mainstream classes. Furthermore, children with an ASD diagnosis start school at an earlier age of three years.

The prevalence of an ASD diagnosis as the primary growth driver supports the case for a full review of the scheme in order to determine the best approach given that the profile of pupils requiring assistance seems to be changing. The findings of the comprehensive review of the SNA scheme, currently underway, will be welcome, in particular to identify the most appropriate form of support options to provide better outcomes for pupils with special educational needs having regard to the significant amount of Exchequer investment in this area.

While these factors were identified in the context of SNA provision, the same factors can be illustrative of the distribution of, and increases in, special education generally. It is crucial that all special education schemes, including eligibility for school transport provision, are monitored, regularly reviewed and revised as necessary, and the outcomes for pupils are captured in a meaningful way to ensure that the most appropriate form of support is provided to support the education of pupils with special educational needs.

The implementation of the SNA FPA recommendation, that the NCSE enhances and develops the range and level of data captured, will be crucial in informing the appropriate care needs supports for pupils with special educational needs and that resources are used effectively. There may be also be a case for the Department

¹⁶ <http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/debates%20authoring/DebatesWebPack.nsf/committeetakes/ESJ2016102700002?opendocument#C00200>

of Education and Skill's Inspectorate to have a clearer, more defined role in monitoring and evaluating special education expenditure.

The upcoming three year full-reassessment of SNA allocations also provides the opportunity to ensure that the most appropriate form and level of support to provide better outcomes for pupils with special educational needs is being identified and provided.

Quality Assurance Process

In addition to the Spending Review Working Group, the author also engaged with the Department of Education and Skills.

Appendix 1

Table 10: Number of pupils in first and second level, 2011/12 to 2016/17

Year	First Level	Second Level (excluding PLC)	Total
2011/12	516,458	322,519	838,977
2012/13	526,422	327,323	853,745
2013/14	536,317	333,175	869,492
2014/15	544,696	339,207	883,903
2015/16	553,380	345,550	898,930
2016/17	558,497	352,407	910,904