



## **SET & SNA Allocation 2024 Report**

### **Analysis of Down Syndrome Ireland Members Survey**





## Introduction

In February 2024, our members were gravely concerned by the content of circulars *0002/2024 and 0003/2024* issued by the Department of Education, relating to the calculation of the SET allocation for each school from the 2024/25 school year until further notice. These circulars propose that the category of “complex educational needs” be removed as a criterion for allocating special education teaching hours in mainstream Primary and Post Primary schools. To get a picture of the current situation, we decided to review the impact the school’s allocation is having on our members since schools, both Primary and Post Primary, have had time to organise and work with the special education teaching hours they have been allocated. Surveys were issued on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024, for completion by parents/guardians of children in Mainstream Primary and Mainstream Post Primary schools. Information was also requested in the surveys on SNA supports in schools. The findings from both surveys are outlined in the Report.

## Total Responses: 208

This represents **11.8%** of the total members invited to participate

- Primary School Survey: **176** responses
- Post primary School Survey: **32** responses

## Report Content: (Primary & Post Primary)

- County of residence of respondents
- Current class/year enrolment

- Current number of sessions per week with the Special Education Teacher by class/year level
- Changes in the level of SET access in September 2024
- Loss of time with the Special Education Teacher
- SNA provision
- Shared access with an SNA
- Changes in the level of SNA provision in September 2024
- Satisfaction with level of SNA support

*Report prepared by Dr Fidelma Brady- Head of Education DSI December 2024*

## Primary School Survey

### County of Residence of Respondents (Total Responses: 176)

County	Number of Responses	% of Total Responses
Carlow	3	1.70%
Cavan	4	2.27%
Clare	7	3.98%
Cork	17	9.66%
Donegal	3	1.70%
Dublin	31	17.61%
Galway	13	7.39%
Kerry	7	3.98%
Kildare	14	7.95%
Kilkenny	7	3.98%
Laois	4	2.27%
Leitrim	1	0.57%
Limerick	7	3.98%
Longford	0	0.00%

Louth	3	1.70%
Mayo	5	2.84%
Meath	13	7.39%
Monaghan	4	2.27%
Offaly	3	1.70%
Roscommon	1	0.57%
Sligo	8	4.55%
Tipperary	4	2.27%
Waterford	6	3.41%
Westmeath	2	1.14%
Wexford	5	2.84%
Wicklow	4	2.27%

**Current Class Enrolment**  
(Total Responses: 175)

Class	Number of Responses	% of Total Responses
Junior Infants	25	14.29%
Senior Infants	23	13.14%
First Class	22	12.57%
Second Class	22	12.57%
Third Class	18	10.29%
Fourth Class	22	12.57%
Fifth Class	15	8.57%
Sixth Class	28	16.00%

**Current Number of Sessions per week with the Special Education Teacher by Class Level**  
(Total Responses: 174)

Number of Sessions	Junior Infants	Senior Infants	First Class	Second Class	Third Class	Fourth Class	Fifth Class	Sixth Class
1	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
2	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
3	1	1	1	4	1	0	1	3

4	2	4	0	0	0	4	1	0
5	10	11	9	8	11	9	9	9
6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
7	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
8	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1
9	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	1
10	1	2	3	3	1	5	1	5
Don't Know	8	3	7	3	3	3	2	5

### Changes in the level of SET access in September 2024

(Total Responses: 174)

Answer Choices	Number of Responses	% of Total Responses
N/A I am a parent of a child in Junior Infants	25	14.37%
Remained the same as in the 2023-2024 school year	79	45.40%
Increased from the 2023-2024 school year	11	6.32%
Decreased from the 2023-2024 school year	29	16.67%
Don't Know	30	17.24%

### Loss of time with the Special Education Teacher due to the teacher providing cover in mainstream classes

(Total Responses: 176)

Answer Choices	Number of Responses	% of Total Responses
Yes	73	41.48%
No	27	15.34%
Don't Know	76	43.18%

### SNA provision

(Total Responses: 175)

Answer Choices	Number of Responses	% of Total Responses
Fulltime SNA Support	71	40.57%
Access to SNA Support	104	59.43%

### Form of Shared Access with an SNA

(Total Responses: 154)

Answer Choices	Number of Responses	% of Total Responses
Shared with other children in the same classroom	67	43.51%
Shared with other children in a different classroom?	47	30.52%
N/A (My child has full time SNA support)	40	25.97%

### Changes in the level of SNA provision in September 2024

(Total Responses: 175)

Answer Choices	Number of Responses	% of Total Responses
N/A I am a parent of a child in Junior Infants	25	14.29%
Remained the same as in the 2023-2024 school year	96	54.86%
Increased from the 2023-2024 school year	4	2.29%
Decreased from the 2023-2024 school year	38	21.71%
Don't Know	12	6.86%

### Satisfaction with level of SNA Support

(Total Response: 175)

Answer Choices	Number of Responses	% of Total Responses
Happy with Level of SNA Support	120	68.57%
Unhappy with Level of SNA Support	55	31.43%

## Post Primary School Survey

### County of Residence of Respondents

(Total Responses: 31)

County	Number of Responses	% of Total Responses
Carlow	1	3.23%
Cavan	1	3.23%
Clare	0	0.00%
Cork	6	19.35%
Donegal	2	6.45%
Dublin	5	16.13%
Galway	1	3.23%
Kerry	2	6.45%
Kildare	1	3.23%
Kilkenny	0	0.00%
Laois	0	0.00%

Leitrim	0	0.00%
Limerick	0	0.00%
Longford	0	0.00%
Louth	1	3.23%
Mayo	3	9.68%
Meath	3	9.68%
Monaghan	0	0.00%
Offaly	2	6.45%
Roscommon	0	0.00%
Sligo	1	3.23%
Tipperary	1	3.23%
Waterford	0	0.00%
Westmeath	0	0.00%
Wexford	0	0.00%
Wicklow	1	3.23%
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b> <b>(1 Skipped)</b>	

### Current Year Enrolment

(Total Responses: 30)

Year	Number of Responses	% of Total Responses
First Year	4	13.33%
Second Year	7	23.33%
Third Year	2	6.67%
Transition Year (TY)	5	16.67%
Fifth Year	8	26.67%
Sixth Year	4	13.33%
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	

### Current Number of Sessions per week with the Special Education Teacher by Year Level

(Total Responses: 28)

Number of Sessions	First Year	Second Year	Third Year	Transition Year (TY)	Fifth Year	Sixth Year
1	2	0	0	1	2	0

2	1	0	0	1	1	0
3	1	2	0	0	0	0
4	0	1	1	1	0	1
5	0	0	0	0	0	0
6	0	0	0	1	0	0
7	0	0	0	0	0	0
8	0	0	0	0	2	0
9	0	0	0	0	0	0
10	0	1	0	0	0	1
Don't Know	0	3	1	1	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>

### Changes in the level of SET access in September 2024

(Total Responses: 32)

Answer Choices	Number of Responses	% of Total Responses
N/A (I am a parent of a student in First Year)	3	9.38%
Remained the same as in the 2023-2024 school year	16	50.00%
Increased from the 2023-2024 school year	1	3.13%
Decreased from the 2023-2024 school year	6	18.75%
Don't Know	6	18.75%

### Loss of time with the Special Education Teacher due to the teacher providing cover in mainstream classes

(Total Responses: 32)

Answer Choices	Number of Responses	% of Total Responses
Yes	4	12.50%
No	5	15.63%
Don't Know	23	71.88%

### SNA provision

(Total Responses: 30)

Answer Choices	Number of Responses	% of Total Responses
Fulltime SNA Support	15	50.00%
Access to SNA Support	15	50.00%

### Form of Shared Access with an SNA

(Total Responses: 27)

Answer Choices	Number of Responses	% of Total Responses
Shared with other students in the same classroom	11	40.74%
Shared with other students in a different classroom?	6	22.22%
N/A (My child has full time SNA support)	10	37.04%

**Changes in the level of SNA provision in September 2024**  
(Total Responses: 31)

Answer Choices	Number of Responses	% of Total Responses
N/A (I am a parent of a student in First Year)	2	6.45%
Remained the same as in the 2023-2024 school year	21	67.74%
Increased from the 2023-2024 school year	0	0.00%
Decreased from the 2023-2024 school year	6	19.35%
Don't Know	2	6.45%

**Satisfaction with level of SNA Support**  
(Total Response: 31)

Answer Choices	Number of Responses	% of Total Responses
Happy with Level of SNA Support	24	77.42%
Unhappy with Level of SNA Support	7	22.58%

## Background

In early 2024, grave concerns were expressed by members of DSI in relation to the content of circulars 0002/2024 and 0003/2024 issued by the Department of Education relating to the calculation of the SET allocation for each school from the 2024/25 school year until further notice. In the circular, it is proposed that the category of “complex educational needs” be removed as a criterion for allocating Special Education Teacher hours- a decision which could have a potentially devastating effect on many pupils with Down syndrome and their educational attainment. This conclusion was based on our understanding and long experience of supporting students with Down syndrome at all levels of the education system.

A child or young person who has additional support needs arising from one or more complex factors or multiple factors (needs that are likely to continue for more than a year) is deemed

to have ‘complex needs.’ To say a pupil has “complex needs” is not just a matter of terminology; it is a very real and important description of that pupil’s educational need, and of the supports they require. And those needs are, indeed, complex and multi-faceted. When we look at children with Down syndrome, we must consider both the intellectual disability and the chromosomal disorder or disability.

The chromosomal disorder in itself has multiple factors:

- Chromosomal disorder affects all parts of the body, so a greater awareness of physical health needed
- Specific motor and sensory issues are common
- Significant additional impact on speech and language

The intellectual disability and chromosomal disorder both contribute to:

- Delayed motor skills, fine and gross – leading to clumsiness and manipulation difficulties
- Health issues
- Auditory and visual differences
- Speech and language disorder, over and above what would be expected
- Short term auditory memory / verbal working memory problems
- Consolidation and retention problems
- Difficulties with generalisations, thinking and reasoning.
- Concentration and attention can be a challenge

The combination of all of these factors must be considered complex needs for children with Down syndrome; and the very complexity of those needs must be the basis for the educational environment provided for them. There is no possible “one size fits all” approach that respects and addresses those needs. Quite simply, many pupils with Down syndrome will not thrive educationally if their complex needs are not specifically addressed.

Research has found that academic progress and achievements were better for those children with Down syndrome in mainstream school, with adequate educational supports in place, as opposed to those children educated in special school settings. The majority of children with Down syndrome now enrol in their local primary school, with increasing numbers progressing to mainstream post-primary school. A recent internal survey conducted by Down Syndrome Ireland (January 2024 - prior to Circulars 0002/2024 and 0003/2024) indicated that 62% of those who responded were enrolled in mainstream schools. Many parents have since expressed their concern and their intention to move their children to a special education setting due to the removal of the category of complex educational needs for the SET allocation

for 2024-2025. An earlier survey (2023) found that 35% of families who had already moved their child to a special school did so because the supports provided in mainstream were not adequate. If the supports provided then were deemed to be inadequate, how can any proposed lessening of supports improve the situation? Schools, in many instances, will have less capacity to meet the needs of this most vulnerable cohort of children. Indeed, the Department directive indicating that the most support should still be directed to those children with the greatest level of need has implications for all children. We must remember that the learning experiences of all children will be impacted, not just those with special needs.

We considered this action by the Department of Education to be a very detrimental for our members with Down syndrome. Every year another 130-150 babies join the population of people with Down syndrome living in Ireland. In the 1980's, average life expectancy for someone with Down syndrome was around 25 years. It's now around 60. The Department of Education, by failing to provide adequate teaching supports in childhood, are kicking the can down the road. They are not just impacting on the lives of children with Down syndrome right now, they are storing up social and economic costs for the future.

## Relevant Circulars

### SET Allocation Circulars

- **Primary School Circular**

**Circular 0002/2024**

Circular to the Management Authorities of Primary Schools

The Special Education Teacher (SET) allocation model and the calculation of the SET allocation for each school from the 2024/25 school year until further notice.

<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/282686/7944731c-b15e-4a98-b76a-b06d899e4789.pdf#page=null>

- **Post Primary Circular**

**Circular 0003/2024**

Circular to the Management Authorities of Post Primary Schools

The Special Education Teacher (SET) allocation model and the calculation of the SET allocation for each school from the 2024/25 school year until further notice.  
<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/282687/b3da8b64-5451-4b5b-b158-e37936d48394.pdf#page=null>

## SNA Allocation Circular

- **Special Needs Assistant Allocation 2024/25**

**Circular No 0049/2024**

Circular to the Management Authorities of recognised Primary Schools and Post Primary, Secondary, Community and Comprehensive Schools and the Chief Executive Officers of the Education and Training Boards

<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/294766/ce90e334-7e14-4f51-8cde-33f65a708d1e.pdf#page=null>

## Overview of Survey Findings

### General Comments on Responses:

On November 7<sup>th</sup> 2024, surveys were issued to be completed by parents/guardians of children in mainstream Primary and mainstream Post Primary schools. Parents were requested to complete either the Primary or Post Primary survey. In addition to sending an email to each of 1763 members (age range 5-18 years), the surveys were also advertised on our social media channels and in our fortnightly DSI Digest. Responses were submitted by 208 respondents which gave a low response rate of 11.8%. Given the levels of disquiet expressed by members earlier in 2024 when the circulars outlining the changes to SET allocation were issued by the Department of Education, there would have been an expectation that considerably more parents would have participated in and responded to the survey.

It was also disappointing that there were no responses received from a number of counties:

- Primary survey: no responses from one (1) county
- Post Primary survey: no responses from thirteen (13) counties

## Primary School Survey Findings

### ➤ SET Allocation – Issues Identified from Responses

- **Changes in the Level of Access to Special Education Teaching**

16.67% of respondents (29) indicated that their child's access to special education teaching had decreased from the 2023-2024 school year

- **Lack of Knowledge in relation to Children's Level of Access to Special Education Teaching**

17.24% of parents (30) indicated that they did not know if their child's level of access to special education teaching had changed from 2023-2024 school year. This is a concerning finding as all parents should know the level of access their child has to special education teaching – how often? for how long? Levels of access should be established at the planning stage for each child and parents should be involved in any planning and decision making for their child. If, for whatever reason, parents are not involved in the planning process, they should be informed by the school in relation to the timetabling for their child's special education teaching time at school. If the school do not automatically provide this information, parents should request it.

- **Children Losing Time with the Special Education Teacher because the Teacher is needed to Provide Cover in a Mainstream Classroom**

41.48% of respondents (73) indicated that their child has lost time with the special education teacher because that teacher had been required to provide cover in a mainstream classroom. This raises the question of the response to this issue by the school –  
(a) Are there records for missed sessions with the special education teacher?  
(b) What provision is there to make up for missed sessions with the special education teacher?

- **Lack of Knowledge in relation to Children Losing Time with the Special Education Teacher because the Teacher is needed to Provide Cover in a Mainstream Classroom**

43.18% of respondents (76) indicated that they did not know if their child has lost time with the special education teacher because that teacher had been required to provide cover in a mainstream classroom. Again, this is concerning! Parents should be notified by the school if sessions are missed, and be informed of the provisions in place to make up for any missed sessions.

## ➤ **SNA Allocation – Issues Identified from Responses**

- **Changes in the Level of Access to SNA Support**

21.71% of respondents (38) indicated that their child's access to SNA support had decreased from the 2023-2024 school year

- **Lack of Knowledge in relation to Children's Level of Access to SNA Support**

6.86% of respondents (12) indicated that they did not know if their child's level of access to SNA support had changed from 2023-2024 school year. Again a concerning finding for the reasons previously outlined.

- **Satisfaction with Children’s Level of SNA Support**

31.43% of respondents (55) indicated that they were not satisfied with their child’s level of SNA support

## Post Primary School Survey Findings

### SET Allocation – Issues Identified from Responses

- **Changes in the Level of Access to Special Education Teaching**

18.75% of respondents (6) indicated that their child’s access to special education teaching had decreased from the 2023-2024 school year

- **Lack of Knowledge in relation to Children’s Level of Access to Special Education Teaching**

18.75% of respondents (6) indicated that they did not know if their child’s level of access to special education teaching had changed from 2023-2024 school year. This is a concerning finding as all parents should know the level of access their child has to special education teaching – how often? for how long? Levels of access should be established at the planning stage for each child and parents should be involved in any planning and decision making for their child. If, for whatever reason, parents are not involved in the planning process, they should be informed by the school in relation to the timetabling for their child’s special education teaching time at school. If the school do not automatically provide this information, parents should request it.

- **Children Losing Time with the Special Education Teacher because the Teacher is needed to Provide Cover in a Mainstream Classroom**

12.5% of respondents (4) indicated that their child has lost time with the special education teacher because that teacher had been required to provide cover in a mainstream classroom. This raises the question of the response to this issue by the school-

- (a) Are there records for missed sessions with the special education teacher?
- (b) What provision is there to make up for missed sessions with the special education teacher?

- **Lack of Knowledge in relation to Children Losing Time with the Special Education Teacher because the Teacher is needed to Provide Cover in a Mainstream Classroom**

71.88% of respondents (23) indicated that they did not know if their child has lost time with the special education teacher because that teacher had been required to provide cover in a mainstream classroom. Again, this is concerning! Parents should be notified by the school if

sessions are missed and be informed of the provisions in place to make up for any missed sessions.

## **SNA Allocation – Issues Identified from Responses**

- **Changes in the Level of Access to SNA Support**

19.35% of respondents (6) indicated that their child's access to SNA support had decreased from the 2023-2024 school year.

- **Lack of Knowledge in relation to Children's Level of Access to SNA Support**

6.45% of respondents (2) indicated that they did not know if their child's level of access to SNA support had changed from 2023-2024 school year. Again, a concerning finding for the reasons previously outlined.

- **Satisfaction with Children's Level of SNA Support**

22.58% of respondents (7) indicated that they were not satisfied with their child's level of SNA support.

## **Conclusion**

In February 2024, the publication of circulars *0002/2024 and 0003/2024* issued by the Department of Education, relating to the calculation of SET allocation for each school from the 2024/25 school year until further notice caused great concern and disquiet for members. These circulars propose that the category of "complex educational needs" be removed as a criterion for allocating Special Education Teacher hours in mainstream Primary and Post Primary schools. The impact of the changes to the SET allocation have been highlighted in this survey, and we are very grateful to our members who completed our survey and provided us with this valuable information. This report will be vitally important as we continue to advocate for our members with the Ministers for Education & Special Education as soon as they have been appointed. In addition, we will continue our engagement with officials from the Department of Education and the National Council for Special Education and will also request a hearing with the relevant Oireachtas Education Committee when established.

The UNCRPD Article 24 (2), quoted below, reaffirms the rights of children to not only attend their local mainstream school, but also to receive effective and individualized support. Policies which reduce the capacity of schools to provide this level of support to the children with the highest level of need or require them to dilute the support offered to other children with additional needs in order to support children with complex needs, can only be described as exclusionary.

- *Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live;*
- *Reasonable accommodation of the individual's requirements is provided;*
- *Persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education;*
- *Effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion.*

***Students with Down syndrome have the right to be educated in their local mainstream school. It is not unreasonable to expect that any additional training and resources required should be provided***