



**Circular 03/2024**

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.**

**1. The purpose of this circular**

The purpose of this Circular is to advise schools of the process for calculating the educational profile for each school and the SET allocation arising from this for the school year 2024/25 and into the future.

Each school will receive notice of their SET allocation for the 2024/25 school year by email in the coming days and it should be read in conjunction with this circular.

**2. Review of the SET allocation model**

The SET allocation model has been in place since 2017 and has its basis in the recommendations set out in “The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Report Delivery for Pupils with Special Educational Needs (NCSE 2014)”.

The Department commenced a review of the model in late 2022 to ensure that it was meeting the changing needs in special education.

During the review process the department sought and listened to the views, concerns and issues raised by our education partners and schools around the existing model. The engagement with our key stakeholders, including staff representatives and management bodies, took place on a number of occasions in order to get feedback on the current model and to take on board the issues that needed to be considered for a revised model.

The review identified that a programme of continuous development was required to ensure that the model was delivering effectively, both in supporting the changing needs in the education system, and for individual schools.

The journey of enhancement begins with the 2024/25 allocation by ensuring that it has a strong foundation. The key to building a solid foundation is ensuring that the data for each pillar within the model, is already available to the department and



provided by schools. Where data, used in the model, is received from external sources, it is critical that the information is being received on a consistent basis.

### 3. What amendments are being made to the model and why?

#### a) Gender Differentiation:

The general consensus of research when the initial report was prepared and the model introduced was that there was a greater level of identified special education need within the male students in our schools. This resulted in a specific portion of hours being applied to the male cohort of a school's enrolment.

It is now accepted that female students have a similar level of need and, in addition, it is apparent that this need is manifesting itself at later stages in their growth and development.

Due to the above, the application of a gender differentiation within the model is being discontinued.

#### b) Complex Needs

The complex needs element of a schools allocation, introduced in the 2017 model, was predicated on the provision of data from the HSE Children Disability Network Teams in relation to children entering junior infants with special education needs who were assessed or triaged for a waiting list for assessment.

The review identified concerns in relation to the accuracy and the consistency of the data provided on a national basis by the CDNTs. This resulted in the potential for significant variations from one area of the country to another. In addition, it is not possible to verify whether all data reported relates solely to educational need as distinct from care need, which is resourced through the Special Needs Assistant allocation process, or medical needs.

**To ensure that schools are not negatively impacted by these issues, all existing hours assigned for complex needs are being maintained for each school and future data from the CDNTs will not be used as a value in the model. This is being done by reappportioning this value at individual school level across the remaining pillars with an emphasis on the Literacy and Numeracy category which demonstrates where additional teaching supports are required. This exercise strengthens the capacity of the model to give a more sustainable allocation to schools, which recognises where there are significant learning needs.**

In addition, over the last number of years with the very significant growth in special classes and the opening of new special schools a significant number of students with more complex needs are now supported in these settings. These elements of the continuum of education provision are resourced separately to the SET model.



By addressing the two items above it provides a solid and consistent foundation for the future development of and enhancements to the model as outlined in section 15 below.

This new model will not lead to any reduction in the overall number of SET teachers. Instead, it will allocate them to the schools with greatest level of needs.

#### **4. The purpose of the SET allocation model at education system level**

The SET allocation model is designed to distribute additional teaching resources across the entire Post Primary school system. This is to ensure that additional teaching resources are available to support students with the greatest level of learning need.

There is a defined level of resources available to distribute across the whole Post Primary school sector.

It is important to understand that SET resources are distributed to schools based on learning needs across the entire system.

This round of allocation of SET resources to schools will see some schools gaining hours while others may see a reduction in hours.

For example, where a school's enrolments is declining there may be a reduction in their SET hours. In these circumstances, these hours will be redistributed to schools with a growing enrolment base.

All data utilised in the model is now sourced from within the education sector and is therefore fully validated and assured. The only external data being used within the model is the HP<sup>1</sup> Index of deprivation <sup>2</sup>which is used by all government departments for identification of disadvantage.

At the system level, the total hours available are allocated on the following basis; 25% to Enrolment, 68.5% to Educational Needs Profile and the remaining 6.5% to support Educational Disadvantage. Each are discussed and explained in greater detail below.

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<sup>1</sup> The Pobal HP Deprivation index is Ireland's most widely used social gradient metric, which scores each small area (circa 100 households) in terms of affluence or disadvantage. The index uses information from Ireland's census, such as employment, age profile and educational attainment, to calculate this score. The index is used by various state agencies and government departments to target resources towards these disadvantaged areas who are most in need.

<sup>2</sup> [Pobal](#) | [Pobal Research](#) | [Pobal Jobs](#) | [Pobal Maps](#) | [Pobal Ireland](#)



Once the hours are allocated as above, the model then apportioned these resources to individual schools based on the changes in each component since the schools profile was last updated in March 2022.

The allocation model provides schools with autonomy to manage and deploy additional teaching support within their school, based on students identified learning needs.

## 5. How is a school profile developed?

A unique educational profile is created for each school and is underpinned by **three pillars**. The details of each pillar of the profile and an explanation of the calculation of each are outlined below.

**It is important that each school understands that;**

**The calculation and rules applied within the model are the same for all schools and are, therefore, a true and accurate representation of the data inputs for each school.**

**All data for each pillar are sourced and verifiable from within the education system or used by all government departments (HP index).**

## 6. What are the three pillars used to create a school educational profile?

**Pillar 1: Enrolment Allocation** - The total enrolment in the school which is sourced from PPOD.

**Pillar 2: Educational Teaching Needs Profile** – This is derived from the literacy and numeracy profile of the school as demonstrated by the junior cycle scores for English and Maths reported by the school.

**Pillar 3: Educational Disadvantage** –The key data source is the Pobal HP Index for Small Areas, which is a method of measuring the relative affluence or disadvantage of a particular geographical area, combined with student data from PPOD.

**Each of the above is described in greater detail below.**

It is important to understand that the overall SET allocation to the school is to support all students with identified special education needs which are recorded in their support file and the following detail is provided for clarity of understanding of how the figure is calculated.

*This means that a school must allocate their hours based on the identified educational needs of their students and not based on the 3 individual pillars used to create the profile.*



## 7. Pillar 1: Enrolment Allocation

It is recognised and generally accepted, both nationally and internationally, that circa 25% of the overall school population may have some form of a special education learning need.

As a result, the model applies 25% of the total SET hours available to the education system on the basis of the number of students in each school. It is important to note that it is 25% of the total national post primary schools allocation of resources available within the Post Primary sector and not 25% of an individual schools allocation.

This means that 25% of all SET hours available to the Post Primary sector are allocated within the model to this pillar. For example, if there are 100,000 in the overall national Post Primary schools allocation, 25% or 25,000 are available to apportion to Post Primary schools.

The enrolment element of a school's allocation (based on a school with 100 students) is calculated as follows:

### Post Primary School with 100 Students

25,000 hours (25% of all hours available) divided by 380,000 (overall enrolments) multiplied by 100 (enrolments in the school) which equals 6.58 hours rounded to two decimal places.

$$\frac{25,000}{380,000} * 100 = 6.58$$

If enrolment drops to 90 the calculation is 25,000 hours (25% of all hours available) divided by 380,000 (overall enrolments) multiplied by 90 (enrolments in the school) which equals 5.92 hours rounded to two decimal places.

$$\frac{25,000}{380,000} * 90 = 5.92$$

Similarly, if enrolments increase by 10, it is 25,000 hours (25% of all hours available) divided by 380,000 (overall enrolments) multiplied by 110 (enrolments in the school) which equals 7.24 hours rounded to two decimal places.

$$\frac{25,000}{380,000} * 110 = 7.24$$

This should provide schools with some reassurance that, if there is change in their enrolment profile each year, the allocation from this pillar will adjust accordingly upwards or downwards.

**The Department is committed to ensuring that the most up to date enrolment numbers for each school are applied annually to the model. The data utilised will be as reported by schools as part of the overall October returns process.**



## 8. Pillar 2: Educational Teaching Needs Profile

While the first pillar of the model provides a standard allocation (to support students with an identified and recorded special education teaching need) to each school based on enrolments, this component is focused on providing SET resources to a smaller portion of the overall student cohort.

The Educational Teaching needs profile is calculated based on educational outcome data provided to the Department of Education by the State Examinations Commission. Hence, the profiles are directly correlated to and focused on students with the greatest level of need in the areas of literacy and numeracy.

The data to support this pillar is the Junior Cycle data for English and Maths. The results of these tests are an indicator of special educational teaching needs within a school.

The results at higher and ordinary level are provided to the Educational Research Centre by the State Examinations Commission.

The lowest performing students are identified in the areas of literacy and numeracy, as an indication of those who require additional teaching support.

The allocation of hours available are graduated based on the three lowest score ranges.

Of the total SET hours available to the education system, 68.5% of the hours are allocated to the key measures of 1. Literacy and 2. Numeracy, which are referred to as the Educational Teaching Need profile.

**To ensure that no single school is at a disadvantage in any given year, the allocation is based on an average of three years Junior Cycle data rather than on a single year.**

**The junior cycle data used to determine each schools allocation for the 2024/25 school year are the 2019, 2022 and 2023 results.**

The number of hours allocated to this pillar is 68.5% of the total national post primary schools allocation available. This is in line with the previous allocation model including previous data from CDNTs for individual schools to create a solid foundation to address the needs of children in a sustainable way.

Due to the complexity of the aggregation of data across multiple years it will not be possible for schools to directly calculate this portion of their allocation. We can say by way of illustration that, if 200,000 SET hours are available to distribute across the system, 137,000 hours (68.5% of 200,000) would be available to apportion to post primary schools within this pillar.



The actual value for the school's educational profile, rather than being 68.5% of a school's allocation, will depend on the individual school's profile relative to the overall national profile.

The 68.5% available to this area of the model is allocated at system level on the basis of the historic split of results from previous years. The hours that equate to 68.5% of the overall hours are allocated across the six "Literacy" and "Numeracy" categories in a similar way to what was done previously.

From the 2024/25 school year onwards the change in allocation to an individual school will be based on a three year average of junior cycle profile scores. This means that any changes going forward will be minimal and graduated as schools profiles are updated each year.

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*To ensure fairness and equity to all schools, exempted Ukrainian/IPAS students are excluded from the calculation for schools who are already in receipt of SET resources through the specific Ukrainian/IPAS process i.e. schools with more than 10 Ukrainian/IPAS students enrolled.*

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## **9. Pillar 3: Educational Disadvantage**

This pillar targets support for students who are at risk of educational disadvantage. Educational disadvantage has been proven in research undertaken nationally and internationally to affect outcomes for students with special education needs.

Socio-economic factors are key drivers of educational disadvantage and to support schools to help such students, a value is applied where students attend a school from a disadvantaged area.

The data which is being used to update the educational disadvantage component of the school profiles continues to be the same data which has been used for the DEIS Identification Model i.e. Central Statistics Office (CSO) Small Area data, as represented in the Haase Pratschke Index of Deprivation (HP Index)<sup>3</sup>.

The key data sources for Post Primary schools are the Post Primary Online Database (PPOD) and CSO data from the National Census of Population as represented in the Pobal HP Index for Small Areas, which is a method of measuring the relative affluence or disadvantage of a particular geographical area.

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<sup>3</sup> Variables used in the compilation of the HP Index include those related to demographic growth, dependency ratios, education levels, single parent rate, overcrowding, social class, occupation and unemployment rates



The use of the HP Index <sup>4</sup>in the context of educational disadvantage is consistent with its use in the DEIS identification process and also its use across a range of government departments and agencies.

**It is important to understand that the allocation from this pillar is focused on the student data rather than a school's designation.**

What this means is that the allocation of hours within this pillar is derived from a process of matching individual student eircodes to the HP Index for Small Areas. This ensures that any school that has enrolled a student(s) from a geographically disadvantaged area is provided with additional support.

The Pobal HP Deprivation Index was published on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2023 which identified that 3.8% of the population live in areas classed as very or extremely disadvantaged.

The number of hours available for this pillar to the model is 6.5% of the overall total and is maintained at the existing levels to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

It is important to note that these students are already allocated hours as part of the previous two pillars and this is an additional value to support those students at greatest risk.

While 6.5% represents the total hours available to the system, the proportion of a school's allocation will depend on the profile of the children attending the school i.e. if a school has a high number of disadvantaged children, then the value is likely to be a higher portion of its allocation and, consequently, if there are very few disadvantaged children attending a school, then this value will be a much lower portion of its allocation.

**10. How is the final overall SET allocation derived for each school**

The total allocation for each school is based on the sum of the 3 individual pillars which is then rounded to the nearest 2.5 hrs.

**11. Frequency of SET model re-profiling**

The current SET allocation model was introduced in 2017 and schools' educational profiles were updated in 2019 and again in 2022.

The intervals between updates to school profiles historically has meant that the model may not have had the capacity to respond to the needs of schools, particularly new and developing schools, to the extent required.

The decision to move to annual updating of school profiles is intended to have a twofold effect:

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<sup>4</sup> [Pobal](#) | [Pobal Research](#) | [Pobal Jobs](#) | [Pobal Maps](#) | [Pobal Ireland](#)





- a) Greater consistency and stability to schools in terms of their allocation from year to year and with the information on each pillar above, a greater understanding for schools of any potential change to their profile from one update to the next.
- b) The change to an annual process will make the model more sensitive to changes in an individual school's enrolment and educational teaching needs profile and adjustments will be applied in a more timely manner.

**The educational profile of each school will now be updated annually from the 2024/25 school year and SET allocations will be advised to schools at the earliest possible date each year.**

It will also allow schools to plan the deployment of their resources more efficiently, with greater stability in allocations as the level of change in allocations compared with a two year cycle is likely to be much reduced. The model will utilise the most up to date information available each year. However, to allow for earlier publication of the SET allocations, the most recently available and validated data at the time allocations are finalised will be applied.

## **12. Filling of Posts**

Special Education Teacher posts should be filled in accordance with the published staffing and redeployment arrangements which will be set out in the Post Primary School Staffing Schedule for the 2024/25 school year.

## **13. Review of allocation between annual updates**

The Allocation of SET hours (posts) is advised to schools as part of the Annual staffing arrangement circular and advised by email from the NCSE.

Schools should refer to this circular as to the basis of the calculation of allocations.

As of the 2024/2025 school year the re-profiling of schools will move to an annual process and this will result in a model which is more responsive to changes in a schools profile. The existing NCSE exceptional review process, which was introduced to address the time intervals between profile updates (2 or more years), will no longer be in place.

However, the Department is cognisant that it is possible that unique circumstances may present in a school which could require an urgent review. In such circumstances, the school may apply for this process through the NCSE. Reviews will be conducted by the NCSE, between March and May each year, to better enable schools to plan for the following September.

Details of this more streamlined **NCSE review** process are available in Appendix 1 below.



#### **14. Further guidance to follow**

Existing guidelines and circulars on the use and deployment of SET resources are currently under review and, following consultations with stakeholders, further guidance for schools in relation to deployment of resources will issue to schools in advance of the 2024/25 school year.

Current guidance can be accessed at the following link;-

[Guidelines for Post Primary schools.pdf](#)

#### **15. Future developments of the SET Allocation model**

As outlined earlier, the focus for 2024/25 allocations is to create a stabilised and solid foundation as the starting point for a roadmap of continuous development and enhancements of the model over the coming years.

The department, along with stakeholders, are cognisant that the model needs to continue to evolve so that the SET allocations process takes into account new or improved data sources and other changes within the school system.

The department is very much aware that additional data is available in individual schools which may not be available consistently across all schools and a key focus of the roadmap is to develop an accurate and verifiable system to capture such data.

A phased high level plan has been compiled to further enhance the model over the coming years. The department intends to undertake further detailed consultations with our education partners in the development of future enhancements to the model. The initial focus will be on areas such as:

- Development of a revised process for resourcing new schools and those in early stages of development
- Development of a mechanism for transfer of resources from primary to post primary based on changing demographics
- Examination of geographically isolated schools
- Examination of additional potential data sets already available in schools or other areas within the early years settings that could support greater sensitivity in the model
- Delivery of a package of training and supports on the use of the continuum and education passports

In the context of an inclusive education and in recognition of the significant growth in special classes and special schools, further work is required to consider SET and special school/class resources to align with the needs of all children.

**In further phases, it is intended that the department, in consultation with education partners, will examine an ongoing continuous improvement process that can give schools more input into identifying the need in their school in the most efficient way possible.**



## Appendix 1

The unique or unanticipated circumstances must be demonstrated to have had a substantial impact on the school to the extent that the school is clearly unable to meet the needs of the full cohort of students even when all existing resources have been fully and effectively managed and deployed. The school should clearly evidence that the overall level of special education teaching allocation in this school does not have capacity to meet this additional need. Schools should be in a position to demonstrate that they are deploying their allocations in accordance with circular 14/2017 and have used the self-reflective questionnaires (Post Primary Guidelines) and support materials in advance of any review process.

Schools should have identified and already sought any training and support needs available from the NCSE and/or National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS).

### Process

The school should seek the review through completion of the application form on the NCSE website and submit their request through the school portal.

An internal NCSE review panel will consider the application ensuring that the school have outlined clearly the unique event and have clearly evidenced that the overall level of special education teaching allocation in this school does not have capacity to meet this additional identified need.

Four outcomes on foot a review are possible:

1. No evidence of unique circumstance - review will not progress
2. Advisor visit to support school in deployment of current resources
3. Desk top review with recommendation made to DE
4. In School review with outcome communicated to DE and school

The NCSE is committed to a timely response to a school's request for review. As school re-profiling will occur on an annual basis, NCSE will engage in reviews for a set period of time each academic year. This will be timed to ensure that schools are facilitated to hire staff for the coming academic year in a timely manner.

The following are examples of unique or unanticipated circumstances which have significantly impacted affected a schools profile and which may be considered as grounds for review:

Any review will consider only the needs of the cohort of students who were not included in the last school profiling.

- Very significant and immediate changes to the local population have occurred in a short space of time, for example significant increase in availability of social housing or the opening of a homeless shelter



resulting in a large number of children with special educational needs enrolling in a school. This will have resulted in a significant increase in school enrolment figures. The school should clearly evidence that the overall level of special education teaching allocation in this school does not have the capacity to meet this additional need.

- Significant trauma at local level that has had a significant impact on the educational needs of students in the school. The school should clearly evidence that the overall level of special education teaching allocation in this school does not have the capacity to meet this additional need.
- A significant increase in the intake or population of students in first year at post primary level who have the greatest level of need in line with the Continuum of Support. Evidence will be required to confirm the level of need and/or that these students are accessing services or on waiting lists for services. The school should clearly evidence that the overall level of special education teaching allocation in this school does not have the capacity to meet this additional need.
- Developing schools who have a significant increase to enrolment based on the previous year's enrolment. The school should clearly evidence that the overall level of special education teaching allocation in this school does not have capacity to meet this additional need.

**The following Circumstances are not considered grounds for a review:**

- Requests based on comparisons with allocations made to other schools.
- Any school which has falling enrolments
- Requests based on updated data, including enrolment data, or additional details, of a non-exceptional nature, which may have become available subsequent to the development of the school profile. Updated data will be considered for all schools as part of the next re-profiling exercise.
- Requests based on additional or alternative data which schools may suggest should be taken into account, but which was not provided for in the development of the school profiles under this scheme.
- Requests based on comparisons between the new allocation model and the previous allocation model, or the allocations that may have applied to schools under the old model if certain factors such as new assessments arising subsequent to the new allocations being made to schools were considered.
- Requests based on the provision of support for individual children from within the total allocation.
- It is expected that there will be some changes to enrolments during the period that the profile stays in place and that some new students with



special education needs will enrol in the school over this time. This will therefore not be considered as an exceptional event, or circumstance, and will not constitute grounds for a review.

- It is also expected that there will be some students from within the current student enrolment who will have newly identified needs. This will therefore not be considered as a unique event, or circumstance, and will not constitute grounds for a review.

**Special Education**

**February 2024**