

INFORMATION NOTE FOR PROFESSIONALS IN RELATION TO DISABILITY CATEGORIES IN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

The purpose of the following note is to assist psychologists and other professionals in the interpretation of Circular 08/02, which replaces certain procedural elements of Circular 8/99, and to provide clarification on areas where difficulties have arisen over the past few years. It is hoped that this clarification will bring about consistency in approach and equity in the allocation of resources. No change is intended in the level of resources being provided to schools. The new arrangements are designed to speed up the process of allocating resources to children and schools and are to cover an interim period from now until the establishment of the National Council for Special Education.

The following sections are supplementary to, and should be read in conjunction with, Appendix II to Circular 08/02.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools.

Pupils with special educational needs include all those whose disabilities and / or circumstances prevent or hinder them from benefiting adequately from the education which is normally provided for pupils of the same age, or for whom the education which can generally be provided in the ordinary classroom is not sufficiently challenging. Such pupils have special educational needs arising from their disabilities and / or circumstances and will require special educational provision to be made for them.

In this information note, it is pupils who have learning difficulties and special educational needs arising from disabilities who are the focus of concern. Many of these pupils attend mainstream schools and it is important that they are identified as early as possible and that the schools arrange for the assessment and diagnosis of their special educational needs and take appropriate steps in providing for those needs. While some pupils with special educational needs will be referred to special schools, it is with pupils in mainstream schools and whose parents wish for them to be supported there that this note is concerned.

Some of these pupils can have their special educational needs met by the class teacher and/or the learning support teacher, using carefully differentiated teaching and appropriate education plans. Other pupils may need, in addition, certain accommodations such as hearing aids, braille machines, computers and / or other assistive technology. A small

number may require support from a special needs assistant. Certain others may need the support of a resource teacher in addition to the help they receive from their mainstream class teachers, or full- or part-time placement in a special class. **Only those pupils who have learning difficulties arising from their disabilities and whose special educational needs cannot be met fully by the class teacher and/or the learning support teacher should be supported by resource teaching or special class placement.**

In interpreting the definition of the various disability categories in Appendix II of Circular 08/02, the following should be noted:

Physical disability

Children with a physical disability who have learning difficulties arising from the disability **may** need resource teaching. Others may need assistive technology only. Some children with severe physical disabilities may have needs for **care** support from a special needs assistant.

Hearing impairment

Pupils with hearing impairment and no other assessed disability may be allocated a maximum of four hours per week teaching support from a resource teacher, or from a visiting teacher and resource teacher combined.

In cases where a pupil with a hearing impairment meets, in addition, the criterion for another disability category, provision is allocated in keeping with multiple disabilities.

Visual Impairment

Pupils with visual impairment and no other assessed disability may be allocated a maximum of 3.5 hours per week teaching support from a resource teacher, or from a visiting teacher and resource teacher combined.

Some pupils with visual impairment **may** have needs for care support from a special needs assistant.

In cases where a pupil with a visual impairment meets, in addition, the criterion for another disability category, provision is allocated in keeping with multiple disabilities.

Emotional Disturbance and / or Behaviour Problems

Some children in this category **may** need resource teaching support. Care support from a special needs assistant may be required where a child's behaviour is a danger to himself or others or where it seriously interferes with the learning opportunities of other children. In certain circumstances, some children may require both supports.

General Learning Disability

In the case of mild general learning disability, the pupil's full-scale IQ score will have been assessed in the range 50 - 69.

In the case of moderate general learning disability, the pupil's full-scale IQ score will have been assessed in the range 35 - 49.

In the case of severe / profound general learning disability, the pupil's full-scale IQ score will have been assessed as being below 35.

Borderline Mild General Learning Disability

In the case of borderline mild general learning disability, the pupil's full-scale IQ score will have been assessed in the range 70 - 79.

The attention of psychologists is directed at the three additional criteria in Circular 08/02 and in particular, that resource teaching should only be recommended where such pupils are experiencing persistent failure in the ordinary class, in spite of the availability of any other existing learning support available to the child in school. Evidence of persistent failure must be recorded in the psychological report.

Autism / Autistic Spectrum Disorder

In the interest of the child with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder and of those who will teach the child, it is desirable that for a definitive assessment of Autistic Spectrum Disorder, a multi-disciplinary team should be involved. Such multi-disciplinary assessment is also in keeping with the policy of the National Educational Psychology Service.

Specific Learning Disability

In the case of specific learning disability, the pupil's full scale IQ score will have been assessed within the Average range, or higher. (Full-scale IQ of 90 or higher). In addition, pupils should have a degree of learning disability specific to basic skills in reading, writing or mathematics which places them at or below the 2nd percentile on suitable, standardised, norm-referenced tests.

Children with special educational needs arising from an assessed syndrome

Generally, where there is a general learning disability, resource teaching support will be allocated in line with hours allocated to pupils assessed within the same IQ band (mild GLD / moderate GLD / severe / profound GLD). In some cases, as with very young children, or where clear evidence is supplied that the pupil has needs for **care support**, the support of a special needs assistant may be allocated for some part of each day.

Specific Speech and Language Disorder

In the case of specific speech and language disorder, it is a pupil's **non-verbal or performance ability** which must be within the average range, or above. (i.e. non-verbal or performance IQ of 90, or above).

The pupil must also have been assessed by a speech and language therapist and found to be at two standard deviations (S.D.) or more below the mean, or at a generally equivalent level (i.e. - 2 S.D. or below, or below a standard score of 70) in one or more of the main areas of speech and language development.

Two assessments, a psychological assessment and a speech and language assessment are necessary in this case.

Multiple Disabilities

Children assessed with multiple disabilities meet the criteria for two or more of the disabilities described above.

N.B. Only pupils who have been appropriately assessed and who meet the relevant criteria for a diagnosis of a learning difficulty under one or more of the above disabilities may receive provision from a resource teacher or in a special class.