

Questions and Replies:

For **Written Answer** on : **20/11/2025**
Question Number(s): 412 Question Reference(s): 64692/25
Department: Education and Youth
Asked by: Richard Boyd Barrett T.D.

QUESTION

To ask the Minister for Education and Youth for an update on the processing of school transport applications for children with disabilities for the current school year; whether it is the case that the CIE office in Broadstone is processing applications across multiple counties; the number of staff currently assigned to this work; and whether additional resources will be allocated to address the backlog and ensure that all eligible children can access school transport as soon as possible.

REPLY

The School Transport Scheme is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department of Education and Youth.

The National Council for Special Education through its network of Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs) acts in an advisory role to my Department on the suitability of placements for children with special educational needs.

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

In the current school year already over 23,000 pupils are travelling daily on dedicated school transport services for children with additional needs.

Currently, over 5,900 new applications under the school transport scheme for children with special educational needs have been received for the 2025/26 school year. It is important to note that while there is a closing date for applications, the Department accept applications all year round so this number is expected to increase.

The above figure includes new applications from pupils who have moved address or school, pupils who will be placed on existing services where there is capacity, and pupils who will require new services which involve a procurement process. This figure also includes applications where families will request a special transport grant where the pupil is deemed eligible for transport, however, it may not be possible for them to travel on school transport services because of their individual requirements.

All applications are received in the School Transport Section of my Department and processed immediately, there is currently no backlog in relation to these applications.

Where a new service is sanctioned, Bus Éireann are required to go through a procurement and vetting process. Where a procurement of a school transport service and the recruitment of a school transport escort is required, this may take several weeks to put in place.

Both the department and Bus Éireann are very conscious of the challenges faced by parents awaiting transport for children with special educational needs. Families of children who are eligible for these services may therefore receive an interim Special Transport Grant (STG). This is a once off payment, paid retrospectively to families once the School Transport service is in place and is intended to assist with the cost of private transport arrangements the family had put in place until the service starts.

For Written Answer on : 20/11/2025

Question Number(s): 413 Question Reference(s): 64693/25

Department: Education and Youth

Asked by: Richard Boyd Barrett T.D.

QUESTION

To ask the Minister for Education and Youth whether there is a mandate for the inclusion of special education classes in all new schools sanctioned by her Department; and if so, whether this is an automatic requirement or decided on a case-by-case basis.

REPLY

In order to make accommodation provision to meet the needs of students with special education requirements, my department has close engagement with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) which has responsibility for coordinating and advising on the education provision for children nationwide. When the NCSE sanction a special class in a school, the school can apply to my Department for capital funding to re-configure existing spaces within the school building to accommodate the class or to construct additional accommodation. Similarly, where special schools wish to expand provision, the school can apply to my Department for capital funding to accommodate additional placements.

This advance planning is building on the significant work to date in delivering additional classrooms for students with special education needs. Dedicated classrooms for pupils with special education needs are now included as standard in all new accommodation briefs for new school buildings and major extension projects. The Department would normally include 2 SEN classes with a new 8-classroom primary school and increase the number of SEN classes based on the size of the primary school being provided. Similarly with a new 1,000 pupil post-primary school, the department is now looking to include 6 SEN classes.

My department and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) reviewed the forward planning for special education needs (SEN) and highlighted the urgent need for additional SEN special classes. In order to respond to this need at pace, my Department is progressing urgent building projects that involve the repurposing of existing space in schools for SEN purposes. These projects will ensure that existing school capacity is optimised and that teaching spaces are adaptable and flexible to facilitate a student-centred approach to

learning. Potential repurposing options will be school and site specific, presenting different opportunities and challenges. To support the delivery of these classes in good time for the 2025/26 school year, a new streamlined approach to funding was made available to repurpose accommodation for SEN. A SEN Start Up grant of €30,000 for each new SEN classroom sanctioned and opened for the 2025/26 school year was payable to the school directly following receipt of NCSE notification of sanctioned classes. Additional funding for small scale repurposing works up to a maximum of €70,000 per class was also available to schools on an application basis. Further information on SEN repurposing supports can be accessed on www.gov.ie.

Since 2020, my department has invested over €6 billion in our schools throughout the country under the National Development Plan, involving the completion of over 1,300 school building projects. In addition, repurposing and optimisation of existing accommodation capacity across the school estate has been a key enabler of timely, local provision of special class capacity in a way that supports best practice in inclusion and integration. Circa 80% of new special classes in 2025/26 are being facilitated in repurposed classroom accommodation.

Government support for this investment, including by way of supplementary capital funding, has delivered real benefits for school communities. Supplementary capital funding of €210 million approved by Government has brought the total capital allocation for 2025 for my department to €1.6 billion.

In July the Government announced a capital allocation of €7.55 billion for the Department of Education and Youth for the period 2026-2030 under the National Development Plan. As part of this NDP allocation my department will place a strong emphasis on provision for children with special educational needs, with a particular focus on meeting annual school place needs.

For Written Answer on : 20/11/2025

Question Number(s): 416,414,415 Question Reference(s): 64696/25, 64694/25, 64695/25

Department: Education and Youth

Asked by: Richard Boyd Barrett T.D.

QUESTION

* To ask the Minister for Education and Youth how far beyond 2026 the NCSE and the Department have planned regarding the provision of sufficient special education places at primary and post-primary level; and to provide details of any long-term forecasts or capital and workforce planning work currently underway.

- Richard Boyd Barrett T.D.

For WRITTEN answer on Thursday, 20 November, 2025.

* To ask the Minister for Education and Youth the plans of the NCSE for the 2026 academic

year for the Dublin northwest area, including the number of new special education places needed.

- Richard Boyd Barrett T.D.

For WRITTEN answer on Thursday, 20 November, 2025.

* To ask the Minister for Education and Youth the number of new special education places that will be provided in the Dublin northwest area, broken down by whether they will be in mainstream settings, special classes, or special schools; and to specify whether any new special schools or classes are due to open by September 2026.

- Richard Boyd Barrett T.D.

For WRITTEN answer on Thursday, 20 November, 2025.

REPLY

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is the statutory body responsible for the provision of special education and allocating supports for children with special educational needs.

My department works closely with the NCSE on the forward planning of new special classes and additional special school places. Building on successive budgets, Budget 2026 has provide for 4,000 new specialist places for the 2026/27 school year.

The information held on the department's Geographical Information System (GIS), particularly in relation to student demographics, is a key component when forecasting the need for additional special class and special school places. My department and the NCSE have undertaken analysis of the trends in special class and special school provision over recent years by county and local school planning area. In total there are 314 local school planning areas.

My department and the NCSE identify the need for special educational provision with consideration to demographical and statistical data and in regard to an areas existing school provision and future capability. In addition, part of the forward planning process as to where new classes, schools or expansion is required looks at how far students are travelling to access an education appropriate to their needs. This is an important factor which has been incorporated into the decision-making process. Consideration is also given to the information the NCSE hold at local level on the number of children seeking a special school place in a region.

Due to increasing demographics and increasing prevalence rates demand for new special classes at post-primary level is expected to increase significantly over the next few years. My department and the NCSE has engaged with post-primary stakeholders regarding this required increase in provision. However, it is also important that provision continues to be provided in settings as local demand requires.

In order to support the NCSE and forward planning my department published Circular 0039/2025. This circular informs school management and patrons of measures introduced to support forward planning and reiterates the need for parents to inform the NCSE that they

are seeking a special educational placement for their child. An earlier date of 1 October was set for parents to do so.

This notification process will provide the NCSE with valuable information as to which students will continue to require a special class as they progress to post-primary level and details on students who require a place for the first time.

The earlier date will allow for earlier sanctioning of classes for the 2026/27 school year, and it is the aim of the NCSE to sanction the majority of new special classes by 31 December 2025.

The NCSE will have a clear picture of the local demand for special class places for the 2026/27 school year after they review and assess all of the information which has been provided through the parents' notification process which closed on 1 October.

Once the NCSE has fully collated and assessed this information, the NCSE will be in a position to engage with schools across the country to open new special classes. The NCSE will also have due regard to any vacant places in existing special classes in an area and any places that will become available through the normal movement of children leaving primary or post-primary school.

I understand that this earlier date does not suit every family, however, it is important that an earlier date was introduced to ensure the NCSE can provide clarity and certainty for families much earlier than in previous years. It will also enable schools to plan more efficiently and will see classes needing significant building works open in time for September's intake of students.

I would like to stress that the NCSE will continue to support all children made known to them after the October deadline also, however, it is important for planning purposes that we set an earlier timeframe for which the NCSE has as much local knowledge and detail as possible in order to plan what new provision is required.

For Written Answer on : 20/11/2025

Question Number(s): 419 Question Reference(s): 64699/25

Department: Education and Youth

Asked by: Richard Boyd Barrett T.D.

QUESTION

To ask the Minister for Education and Youth whether a school in Dublin 11 (details supplied) has scope for expansion beyond its current size; and whether any such expansion is being planned or funded by the Department or the NCSE. (Details Supplied) Scoil Chiarán

REPLY

Enabling children with special educational needs to receive an appropriate education is a priority for this Government. It is also a key priority for me, my department and for the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).

The vast majority of children with special educational needs are supported to attend mainstream classes with their peers. Where children with more complex needs require additional supports, special class and special school places are provided.

This is in keeping with policy on an inclusive education, which promotes that children will be supported to receive an education in the most inclusive setting possible.

In order to support the NCSE and forward planning my department published Circular 0039/2025. This circular informs school management and patrons of measures introduced to support forward planning and reiterates the need for parents to inform the NCSE that they are seeking a special educational placement for their child. An earlier date of 1 October was set for parents to do so.

This notification process will provide the NCSE with valuable information as to which children will continue to require a special class as they progress to post-primary level and details on students who require a place for the first time.

The earlier date will allow for earlier sanctioning of classes for the 2026/27 school year, and it is the aim of the NCSE to sanction the majority of new special classes by 31 December 2025.

Once the NCSE has fully collated and assessed this information, the NCSE will be in a position to engage with schools across the country to open new special classes. The NCSE will also have due regard to any vacant places in existing special classes in an area and any places that will become available through the normal movement of children leaving primary or post-primary school.

Budget 2026 has provided funding for 3,000 new special educational places within our education system and the NCSE is currently examining where this provision is best placed for the 2026/27 school year.

In order to ensure new special classes can open as quickly as possible the NCSE prioritise working with medium and larger primary schools who do not already have a special class and have available accommodation to accommodate new special class. This approach maximises the use of existing space which can be reconfigured efficiently while also ensuring that new provision continues to be established. It also increases the number of schools with special classes providing parents with greater choice and reducing the distances that some children are travelling to access a special class place.

However, as in other years where schools have no available accommodation, particularly at post-primary level and there is known demand in a local area, my department will continue to provide additional classroom accommodation to provide necessary places.

The NCSE will have a clear picture of the local demand for special class places for the 2026/27 school year after they review and assess all of the information which has been

provided through the parents' notification process which closed on 1 October.

For Written Answer on : 20/11/2025

Question Number(s): 420,417,418 Question Reference(s): 64700/25, 64697/25, 64698/25

Department: Education and Youth

Asked by: Richard Boyd Barrett T.D.

QUESTION

* To ask the Minister for Education and Youth the estimated number of children expected to require special education places in second-level settings, including mainstream supported places, special classes, and special schools in the Dublin northwest area over the next five years.

- Richard Boyd Barrett T.D.

For WRITTEN answer on Thursday, 20 November, 2025.

* To ask the Minister for Education and Youth the current status of the NCSE's expression of interest process for 2026 school places for children with special educational needs, given that the online form closed in October 2025 and has since been removed from the NCSE website; and the alternative mechanism has been put in place for parents to express interest beyond that deadline, as was previously indicated in the Minister's statement of 15 September 2025.

- Richard Boyd Barrett T.D.

For WRITTEN answer on Thursday, 20 November, 2025.

* To ask the Minister for Education and Youth the number of parents that have completed the NCSE expression of interest form for 2026; and the number of parents the NCSE had expected or invited to complete it but have not yet done so.

- Richard Boyd Barrett T.D.

For WRITTEN answer on Thursday, 20 November, 2025.

REPLY

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is the statutory body responsible for the provision of special education and allocating supports for children with special educational needs.

My department works closely with the NCSE on the forward planning of new special classes and additional special school places. Building on successive budgets, Budget 2026 has provide for 4,000 new specialist places for the 2026/27 school year.

The information held on the department's Geographical Information System (GIS), particularly in relation to student demographics, is a key component when forecasting the need for additional special class and special school places. My department and the NCSE have undertaken analysis of the trends in special class and special school provision over recent years by county and local school planning area. In total there are 314 local school planning areas.

My department and the NCSE identify the need for special educational provision with consideration to demographical and statistical data and in regard to an areas existing school provision and future capability. In addition, part of the forward planning process as to where new classes, schools or expansion is required looks at how far students are travelling to access an education appropriate to their needs. This is an important factor which has been incorporated into the decision-making process. Consideration is also given to the information the NCSE hold at local level on the number of children seeking a special school place in a region.

Due to increasing demographics and increasing prevalence rates demand for new special classes at post-primary level is expected to increase significantly over the next few years. My department and the NCSE has engaged with post-primary stakeholders regarding this required increase in provision. However, it is also important that provision continues to be provided in settings as local demand requires.

In order to support the NCSE and forward planning my department published Circular 0039/2025. This circular informs school management and patrons of measures introduced to support forward planning and reiterates the need for parents to inform the NCSE that they are seeking a special educational placement for their child. An earlier date of 1 October was set for parents to do so.

This notification process will provide the NCSE with valuable information as to which children will continue to require a special class as they progress to post-primary level and details on students who require a place for the first time.

The earlier date will allow for earlier sanctioning of classes for the 2026/27 school year, and it is the aim of the NCSE to sanction the majority of new special classes by 31 December 2025.

The NCSE will have a clear picture of the local demand for special class places for the 2026/27 school year after they review and assess all of the information which has been provided through the parents' notification process which closed on 1 October.

Once the NCSE has fully collated and assessed this information, the NCSE will be in a position to engage with schools across the country to open new special classes. The NCSE will also have due regard to any vacant places in existing special classes in an area and any places that will become available through the normal movement of children leaving primary or post-primary school.

I understand that this earlier date does not suit every family, however, it is important that an earlier date was introduced to ensure the NCSE can provide clarity and certainty for families much earlier than in previous years. It will also enable schools to plan more efficiently and

will see classes needing significant building works open in time for September's intake of students.

I would like to stress that the NCSE will continue to support all children made known to them after the October deadline also, however, it is important for planning purposes that we set an earlier timeframe for which the NCSE has as much local knowledge and detail as possible in order to plan what new provision is required.

For Written Answer on : 20/11/2025
Question Number(s): 421 Question Reference(s): 64701/25
Department: Education and Youth
Asked by: Richard Boyd Barrett T.D.

QUESTION

To ask the Minister for Education and Youth her views on the availability of early intervention preschool places on the northside of Dublin; the plans to provide new early intervention places in Dublin 11 and Dublin 9, where there is only one setting (details supplied) and some private provision through the home tuition grant. (Details Supplied) St Fergal's.

REPLY

The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) under the Department of Children, Disability and Equality, enables the full inclusion and meaningful participation of children with disabilities/additional needs in the Early Childhood Care & Education Scheme (ECCE) programme. Its goal is to create a more inclusive environment in pre-schools, so all children availing of preschool, regardless of ability, can benefit from quality early learning and care. There has been a significant increase in resources and supports provided to children with additional needs accessing the AIM programme over recent years.

It is important to note that a diagnosis is not required in order to access AIM supports and that while some children require additional supports at preschool level, many will transition into mainstream classes thereafter. This trend has also been noted as students' progress from primary level to post-primary.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is the statutory body responsible for the provision of special education and allocating supports for children with special educational needs. Where the NCSE identifies need for an early intervention class, the class is sanctioned, and supports are provided by my department to ensure the school can accommodate the class. Generally, these classes are resourced at a 6:1 student/teacher ratio and two special needs assistants (SNAs) are allocated to each class.

Early intervention classes are available in mainstream and special school settings for children aged 3 -5 years old with a diagnosis of autism. There is also a small number dedicated to children who are deaf/hard of hearing. These classes are intended to provide early support to children before they start school and can aid their transition to junior infants.

The NCSE is currently collating the data and information received by 1 October through the parents notify process and are engaging with schools regarding where specialist provision is best placed for the 2026/27 school year. It is envisioned that the majority of these special classes will be sanctioned by 31 December 2025.

My department and the NCSE are committed to ensuring that sufficient special education placements remain available for children with special educational needs and will continue to review and monitor the situation as to where new specialist provision is required.