

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON THE NEW CIRCULAR ON THE ROLE OF THE SNA

<p>How is the SNA role described in the circular?</p>	<p>The SNA role is described as “To enable students with diverse needs to access the curriculum and participate fully in school life.”</p>
<p>Will the role of SNAs change or expand?</p>	<p>No. The circular does not expand the SNA role. The SNA role has changed a lot since it was described in circular 30/2014. The new circular recognises what SNAs are already doing day-to-day.</p>
<p>Will the title of SNA change?</p>	<p>No. The Department will continue using the term ‘special needs assistant’ or ‘SNA’. ‘Special Needs Assistant’ is used in policy and legislation covering the role.</p>
<p>Will the SNA role be a professional role?</p>	<p>Yes. SNA will be recognised as a professional role. The Department will immediately recognise the new QQI Level 6 minimum qualification. The requirement for SNAs to have the minimum qualification will be phased in over five years. After this it will become the standard entry qualification for the role for all new SNAs. There will be exemptions for SNAs approaching retirement and for current SNAs with experience.</p>
<p>Will schools get more SNAs?</p>	<p>No. The NCSE decides how many SNAs a school gets. They use a set of criteria to judge how much support a school needs. Their criteria grows as more needs are identified. The government sets the budget for how many SNAs can be hired. The NCSE can hire as many SNAs as their budget can afford.</p>
<p>Will there be a change to the NCSE’s criteria?</p>	<p>Yes. The new Circular recognises the full range of supports SNAs give to their students. Before the new circular only physical care support was recognised. The new circular recognises important supports like emotional regulation, managing challenging behaviours and supports for learning and development. The NCSE will decide SNA numbers based on the full range of student needs.</p>
<p>Will this change how SNAs can be assigned by the principal?</p>	<p>No. The principal will assign SNAs to students. Principals must follow the NCSE ‘Continuum of Care guidance’ when they assign SNAs to students. Students with greater needs and an assessment of need (AON) will be given support first. Students do not need to have an AON to be assigned an SNA. This is because students can wait years for an AON in the public system.</p>
<p>What did the Department do to listen to SNAs and school communities before writing the new circular?</p>	<p>The Department spent two years talking to SNAs and school communities before coming to their conclusions. Over the two years the department has held:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 55 working group meetings. ▪ More working group meetings with school leaders, teachers, children and SNAs. ▪ A national Survey of SNAs.

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Will my reporting relationship with the principal change? Will my interactions with the teacher change?

No. There will be no change to your reporting relationships. But, you will have a bigger role in the school. You will now:

- Have more input into SEN provision.
- Attend staff meetings.
- Assist in student centred planning.
- Have input into care plans.
- Engage with parents.

Will this change how I should support children?

No. The circular will not change your role as an SNA. The circular catches up with the reality of what SNAs are already doing day-to-day.

What are Core Care Duties?

'Core Care Duties' is a new term which replaces 'Primary Care Needs'. The term covers the supports an SNA gives a student. The circular gives examples of which supports are 'Core Care Duties'.

Does the new Circular recognise the role that SNAs play in helping students during class time?

Yes. The circular recognises that an SNA will support a student with non-instructional tasks under the supervision of a teacher. Including:

- clarifying tasks
- prompting
- reinforcing instructions
- maintaining attention
- academic development
- independent living
- functional life skills
- behaviour
- social and emotional wellbeing.

Will I be expected to be more involved in student planning and review processes?

Yes. SNAs learn important information because they work closely with students. Your input is needed to get the best results for your student. The circular recognises this. This recognition is an important part of making the SNA role a professional role.

Will the circular change the role of the teacher in any way?

No. The teacher will stay in charge of the education and personal development of students. SNAs will stay in a support role. You will continue to help students to take part in learning. The circular formally recognises your role.

Will I have sole responsibility for making support plans for my students?

No. You will work with the teacher to create support plans. The teacher will create support plans with your help and input.

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Will I have to attend all SENO, psychologist, and staff meetings?

No. But you will have more input into these meetings. You should go to these meetings when you are needed. You should get the agreement and guidance of the class teacher or principal before you attend a meeting.

Will I be able to engage directly with parents and guardians?

Yes. SNAs were always able to engage with parents and guardians when it comes to the children in their care. Some schools do not allow it at the moment. The circular recognises that SNAs can engage with parents and guardians. You will have to obey school policies and have the agreement of the principal or teacher.

Does the Circular explain what I need to do as an SNA?

Yes. The Circular includes a list of your core care duties. It also clearly describes what your duties are. This will avoid any future abuse of the role. It replaces the old circulars 30/2014 & 71/2011.

Will the Circular change my supervision responsibilities?

No. The circular sets the limits of your supervision responsibilities. You can help teachers supervise during break time, assembly and dispersal times. You can also supervise for a short time while a teacher takes a toilet break or drops into another classroom. You are not expected to supervise a child or children for longer periods of time.

Will I be responsible for managing therapy services?

No. But you might:

- help students access therapy support in schools.
- help a therapist give support to a student.
- help your student do therapy tasks.

Will I perform therapeutic interventions with children?

No. But you might help your student carry out a therapeutic intervention. You should talk with the therapist before helping with therapy tasks.

Will my work hours or working patterns change?

No. The circular recognises that the working week is not 32 hours. In your contract your working hours will be the usual classroom hours you work. The circular also states that the time before school starts and after school finishes are for specific tasks. These tasks include preparation and arrival, and tidying and dispersal. When these tasks are completed, you should be allowed to leave. You should not be kept until a specific time.

Will I have responsibility for making a transition plan for a student who moves school?

No. You will help your student transition to a new school. Your job will be to make the move less scary for your student. You will give structure and explain the change to them where needed. You might work with the teacher or principal on a transition plan for the student.

What are “Other Support Tasks”?

Other Support Tasks are SNA tasks that are not Core Care Duties. Some examples of other support tasks are:

- Helping students with SEN during sports activities.
- Giving input on care needs in reports, files, or journals.
- Helping to plan and prepare the files of your students.
- Helping teachers to supervise the yard and classrooms at break time.

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Will I have to get into the pool with my student during swimming lessons?

Yes. You will get into the pool to help your student take part in swimming lessons. You will not teach the student to swim. The circular recognises that there are reasons why you might not be able to help a student with swimming lessons. These include:

- If you have a fear of water.
- If you cannot swim or are a weak swimmer.
- If you have a certified medical reason.

Will I still have to work the 72-hours?

No. The 72 hours will be replaced with continual professional development (CPD) and school community time (SCT). Both are fully described in the circular. Principals will not be able to use CPD or SCT make SNAs do unsuitable work. There is more information in our FAQs on the 72 hours and June working.

Will my school be able to misuse School Community Time?

No. The Circular and the Departments Guidance Document describes how School Community Time (SCT) time is to be used. There is more information in our FAQs on the 72 hours and June working.

Will I have to do training?

Yes. You will still need to do trainings like child protection, manual handling, and health and safety. The school will pay for a training if you need the training to help a student with a specific need. The Department will offer other learning and develop trainings. These will be given through education centres.

Will I have to find and pay for training courses myself?

No. You will not have to find or pay for your training. If you see a training you want to take, you can ask the school to pay for it. The time you spend on trainings will count as part of your continual professional development.

Do courses have to be relevant to the SNA role?

Yes. Training will need to be relevant to your job as an SNA.

What are policy planning and whole school collaboration meetings?

Policy planning and whole school collaboration meetings are meetings held in the school. They are meetings where staff discuss school matters and policy. The time spent on these meetings will count as school community time.

Will I need to sit in on meetings about teachers' issues?

No. But you should sit in on meetings about SEN students or issues that effect SEN students.

Will I need to fill out a form recording the hours I work?

You must record work hours under Irish law. The form will also track the time you spend on continual professional development (CPD) and school community time (SCT). This will protect you from abuse of SCT.

What will happen with June Working?

Your school will not be able to ask you to come in unless there is SNA appropriate work for you. You will need to go in to the school if your student needs support while they take exams. You might need to come in for in-person training. You will not have to come in to do odd-jobs or if there is no SNA work for you. There is more information in our FAQs on the 72 hours and June working.

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Could I be given set times to be in school during June?

No. You will only have to go into your school if you have SNA work to do.

What does 'SEN related' and 'SNA appropriate' work mean?

This is the work you do to support students with special education needs. It is work that would not need to be done if there were no SEN students in your school. It is described in the new SNA contract and in the circular.

Will I have to stay until a set time?

No. When you finish your tasks for the day you can leave. Even if it is the last day of the year.

Does setting up an exam centre mean moving furniture?

No. Moving furniture is the caretaker's job. SNAs will help students by setting up their student's things and making sure they have everything they need.

Will I have to use ICT equipment or set it up?

No. You will be able to help students with ICT equipment if you know how to. You will not have to help students with ICT equipment if you do not know how to. You should not be asked to do tasks you are not trained or qualified to do.

Could my school make me be a superintendent, reader, scribe or exam aide?

No. You will be able to volunteer to do any of these jobs if you want. Your school will not be able to force you do any of these jobs.

What does 'assist students with SEN as required during exams' mean?

It means you will support your student the same way you do day-to-day. Your role will not change during exams.

Would I be able to do training at home during June?

Yes. The circular states that you would be able to do training from home during June.

When will allocations be announced?

Allocations will be announced earlier in the year, around Easter.

Will there be less use of substitution/fixed term contracts?

Yes. Also, you will be given a permanent contract if you have had fixed-term contracts for four years or more.

Can the school assign me as a whole school resource to all children?

No. You might not be assigned to a specific student. You will be assigned to students in order of who needs most support. The Department will include SNA assignments as part of their inspections in future.

How will the new policies and guidance be enforced?

The SNA industrial relations forum will be used to enforce new policies and guidance. There are also plans to set up a new national forum for enforcement.