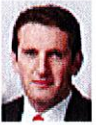


Written answers

Tuesday, 21 November 2023

Department of Education and Skills Education Policy



[Aodhán Ó Ríordáin](#) (Dublin Bay North, Labour)

Link to this: [Individually](#) | [In context](#)

262. To ask the Minister for Education and Skills the reason no provision is made to schools for the deaf for ISL interpretation outside of the standard capitation grant; her views on whether her Department is compliant with the spirit and with the provisions of the Irish **Sign language** Act 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [51036/23]



[Josepha Madigan](#) (Dublin Rathdown, Fine Gael)

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Enabling children with special educational needs to receive an education is a priority for this government. It is also a key priority for me as Minister for Special Education & Inclusion, for 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 classes and special school places are provided.

For 2023, the spend by my department on special education has been substantially increased by over 10% on last year, meaning that for 2023 my department will spend over €2.6 billion on special education. Further progress has been made in Budget 2024 where 26% of my department's budget will be dedicated to providing supports for children with special educational needs, representing a 5% increase on Budget 2023.

This includes funding to support children with special educational needs in mainstream classes; funding for new special classes and new special school places; additional special educational teachers, special needs assistants (SNAs) and funding for the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS).

In 2023, the number of teaching and SNA posts in our schools will increase with an additional 686 teachers and a further 1,194 SNAs. In 2024 a further 744 teachers, and 1,216 SNAs will be added to deliver up to 2,700 new places for children with special educational needs. This will mean we will have over 41,500 qualified and committed people in our schools who are focused wholly and exclusively on supporting children with special educational needs.

This year's budget will also provide targeted funding for school communities with an increase in capitation of over €81 million.

The current standard rate of capitation grant is €183 per pupil at primary level and at post-primary the standard rate is €316 per student for voluntary secondary schools. The standard capitation rates are different for community and comprehensive schools as well as those in the Education and Training Board (ETB) sector as these schools are funded via non-pay budget grants from the department.

As part of the capitation package in Budget 2024, €21 million has been secured as a permanent increase in capitation funding to assist schools now and in the long term with increased day-to-day running costs. This will support a permanent restoration of funding for all primary and post-primary schools from September 2024. This will bring the basic rate of capitation to €200 per student in primary schools and to €345 in

voluntary secondary schools. Enhanced rates will also be paid in respect of pupils with special educational needs. This represents an increase of circa. 9.2% of current standard and enhanced capitation rates.

The €81 million secured for capitation also includes €60 million as part of the Cost of Living measures in Budget 2024. All recognised primary and post-primary schools in the Free Education Scheme will benefit from this additional capitation funding which will be paid at an average rate of €49 per pupil at primary level and €75 at post-primary level. Enhanced rates will also be paid in respect of pupils with special educational needs.

Schools also receive an Ancillary Services Grant. The standard rate is €173 per pupil in primary schools and €224.50 per student in post-primary schools.

Primary schools with less than 60 pupils are paid the capitation and the ancillary grants on the basis of having 60 pupils. At post-primary level, schools with less than 200 students receive ancillary related grants on the basis of having 200 students.

Schools also receive a range of other grants including book grants, programme grants etc. For the 2023/24 school year, a landmark new scheme was introduced that signifies a new chapter in Irish primary education to provide free school books for all primary and special school pupils. The total free primary book grant amount paid to date in 2023 is €53.5m.

I am very pleased to say funding has been secured to extend the free school books scheme to junior cycle students from the start of the next school year in September 2024. The total funding available for this extension of the scheme is €67 million.

I understand the need for increased capitation funding and I am pleased that significant increases in capitation funding for primary and post-primary schools in Budget 2024 has been secured. Including a permanent restoration of capitation funding as well as an increase for cost of living pressures.

Outside of capitation, my department provides a range of supports for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, within mainstream classes, the 24 special classes and through the 2 established schools for deaf children.

The department has in place an Irish **Sign Language** (ISL) Home Tuition Scheme which supports families of students who rely on ISL. 240 children and their families are supported under the scheme by approximately 72 tutors.

Under my department's [Assistive Technology](#) Scheme, over 600 children last year benefitted from specialised equipment for the vision and hearing impaired.

In addition, there is existing provision in place, which provides a dedicated SNA with ISL competency to support students in mainstream settings to access the curriculum and engage in school activities.

The Bachelor of Education (Irish **Sign Language**) is the first programme of its kind in the history of the State. This is an undergraduate pilot programme in Dublin City University (DCU) that enables deaf and hard of hearing people who use Irish **Sign Language** (ISL) to enter primary teaching. It is a four-year, full-time, honours degree specifically designed for deaf and hard of hearing students who communicate through ISL.

Considerable research led by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is ongoing at present in the area of ISL and the curriculum to further support children whose primary **language** is ISL.

In November 2022 the commencement of the first phase of the implementation of an enhanced scheme of ISL provision was announced. This new scheme is in addition to the existing provision that is in place, in which the enhanced scheme includes the implementation of two new roles to the education system.

This first phase of the scheme allows for resources to be targeted towards supporting pupils and families where specific intensive support is required in order to access the curriculum and to allow for learning and improvement of the scheme going forward.

As part of the expansion of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) that was announced in Budget 2023, 40 dedicated new staff are being allocated for this first phase of the ISL Scheme.

Under the scheme, two new posts are being created, an ISL – Specialist Classroom Support (SCS) referred to as ISL-SCS and an advisor deaf/hard of hearing (ISL) (referred to as ISL Advisor).

The role of the ISL-SCS is to consistently convey the spirit and content of the communication occurring in the classroom and enhance active engagement with learning and participation in school life by the student.

The focus of the new ISL Advisor will be to build capacity in ISL across the school community including teachers, SNAs, other school staff and students.

The NCSE has the responsibility for planning and coordinating school supports for children with special educational needs, currently, there are 29 Visiting Teachers (VTs) for students who are deaf/hard of hearing available within NCSE.

Visiting teachers for students who are deaf or hard of hearing are qualified teachers with particular skills and knowledge of the development and education of children with varying degrees of hearing loss. They offer longitudinal support to children, their families and schools from the time of referral through to the end of post-primary education.

Each VT is responsible for a particular region and is allocated a caseload of students. The VT supports children/young people, parents, guardians, teachers and other professionals involved with the child. The work of the VT involves liaising with others such as speech and **language** therapists, psychologists, early intervention teams, school staff, and with parents.

My department will continue to support the NCSE and schools through the provision of the necessary funding and capital investment to ensure all children are successful in accessing an education.

Comments

No comments