

Supporting Students with Autism: Good Practice Guidelines for Schools

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Using bullet points, please provide feedback from your organisation **on one template only.**

Please forward to: guidelines@education.gov.ie by **1pm on 20th November** [extended deadline]

What did you find helpful about these guidelines?	<p>In the timescales, we were limited to a relatively fast read-through. The following are the key points:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It is clear that a lot of work has been put into the draft Guidelines; they look comprehensive, are very good, and have been awaited for some time. They are particularly strong in terms of involving the whole school community. 2. In relation to the operational aspects of catering for the needs of pupils with Autism, there are excellent points about identifying needs, and the interventions are well laid out. In particular, school leaders will find the strengths of a child with Autism useful, along with how to identify the needs. 3. The Guidelines are aspirational and provide a vision of what can be achieved. They will provide a key information resource for schools who are considering opening a special class. 4. The description of the wraparound training is very positive, and will have a very positive impact, <u>if it can be fully implemented.</u> 5. The ‘Closer Look’ section is very useful with many clear ideas to utilise. 6. The templates are excellent.
What, if any, additional resources might strengthen the guidelines (please reference specific section/page no.)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Guidelines present more of an aspirational, ‘ideal world’ than information that will help schools to deal with ‘real world’ contexts and issues. They do not deal with what should be done when the guidelines don’t go far enough, for example, when the resources are not available, or when a parent does not accept the school’s assessment of their child’s behaviours, an issue relating to integration, or a concern about the

	<p>appropriateness of the placement in a special class. Back-up supports providing expert advice and guidance are needed for school leaders grappling with these very challenging home/school communication scenarios.</p> <p>2. There is an assumption throughout the Guidelines and supporting documents that pupils in Mainstream and Special Classes are correctly placed in the context of the current structures/model, and that there is agency support readily available. This is not the reality on the ground.</p> <p>3. Another key issue is in relation to resourcing to fully implement the guidelines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Adequate staffing is crucial b) Relevant, specific, appropriate and adequate training is essential, for both new and existing staff, including special education teachers (SETs), SNAs and school leaders. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. Specialised training is needed for the specific issues that relate to each child, whether sensory processing or other aspects of speech and language therapy, or specific behavioural issues etc. II. Relevant training is needed to cater for the needs of different staff who have different roles in supporting children III. Adequate training is needed to ensure that ALL staff who are involved in supporting children with Autism have sufficient training to meet their varying needs IV. Modular, online training could be sourced and made available to meet these needs, to minimise the need to bring specialists into individual schools, which is a very costly approach c) There are only two mentions of SNAs throughout – this does not reflect the crucial role these staff play in supporting pupils with Autism and achieving successful outcomes d) The supports available are clear and how schools can examine their own practices. e) The guidelines do not refer to the level of need in relation to staffing, training and other resources, to fully meet the needs of these pupils and how to secure same. It would be useful if the guidelines dealt with this. <p>4. With reference to Appendix 8A, the template helps to identify the level of training required by staff, but there is no indication of <i>how to source and fund</i> that training, especially if there is an urgent need to support a child.</p>
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	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Potential need to close Special Classes for pupils with Autism for whole-Unit/school training, where there is a need to have all relevant staff members present. 6. Specific guidance in relation to best practice in integration with mainstream classes (including reverse integration) needs to be included. Many schools with special classes for ADS use the level of integration as a criterion and/or a measure of success in terms of pupil engagement and outcomes. There appears to be a conflation of integration with transition, but these are two very different things and require separate guidance. 7. The constraints around GDPR and the need for parental consent to seek support and guidance from agencies when a school has a concern about an individual child is a particular issue. It would be helpful if the Guidelines could cover this in some way. 8. Appendix 2: The use of these templates, put into practice and whole team/school approach and understanding is key. 9. We have some specific feedback with reference to individual page numbers, as follows: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Pg 3: Learning Environment – The specific size/layout of classes will have impact on how well needs can be met. Many schools cannot meet the ideal class as designed by the DE Building Section. b. Pg 7: NCSE: Best practices – engagement with those on the ground is missing – vital experience. c. Pg 13: As noted above, parents’ lack of acknowledgment / acceptance regarding diagnosis can cause a lot of difficulties in school - what does the school do then? This is the reality in most schools. d. Pg 17: Interventions: This seems to indicate that only the school is involved in interventions - it should be a multi-faceted approach including agencies and external expertise where required e. Pg 19: There needs to be an acknowledgement of the severity of need f. Pg 20: Home / School experiences are very different. Can cause issues for parents. g. Pg 21: Agency, ongoing engagement is a key component in a child’s development and should not be overlooked. School staff are not specialists, even with years of experience. h. Pg 26: Suitable environment/placement missing? i. Pg 31: As above.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> j. Pg 37: The diagram shows an ‘ideal world’ scenario that is not feasible / achievable in many, if not most, schools. What can a school do if it has far less space than desired by the best practice guidelines? k. Pg 49: Availability of relevant CPD for Staff? l. Pg 50: Availability of SLT? m. Pg 63: Correct placement again is key, whether it is in Mainstream or Special Classes n. Pg 72: Again, is there capacity in school to do this – what should happen if there is not sufficient capacity? o. Pg 79: Again, correct placement offers the clearest chance of needs being met. Impact on pupils on Continuum of Support is very negative. p. Pg 99: Sufficient CPD needs to be available to all staff members. See point 3 above. q. Pg 140: Again, appropriate placement of pupil is key re. behavioural development. r. Pg 175; Success criteria needed / suggested? As noted above, integration seems to be missing here and elsewhere. Integration and transition are different s. Pg 178; Is the quote re. ‘post-school transition plan’ still a current suggestion by NCSE? Is the pathway clear throughout transition from setting to setting? t. Pg 181/182; Research MCA 2011. Is the research still current/relevant – does it need to be refreshed? <p>10. Part 2: This is an excellent document. There should be a suggested approach for schools in terms of how it can be used. For example, best practice would (likely) be a whole-school approach, where possible) and integration into the school’s School Self Evaluation framework.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Administration time is required, with substitute cover, to facilitate the SET/DP/Principal to complete this work. All schools with special classes need additional release time, those led by teaching principals need more. b. Schools should be empowered to whether this is warranted in their individual setting.
<p>Is there any aspect of the text of the guidelines that you think needs to be changed? If so can you note the page number and suggest alternative language.</p>	<p>We have not identified any in the timescales.</p> <p>Timeline does not assist this work. Such a detailed document does warrant more time for further review, especially as this will be eventually used by each school. Cannot be chasing this once ‘the horse has bolted’ – this is seen far too often within the many ideas from DES/NCSE.</p>

<p>Are there any specific improvements to the content and format that will enhance schools' use of this Guide?</p>	<p>More on how to identify needs. What is there is good, and ambitious, but more detail is needed, as well as clarity on where guidance is available where needed.</p> <p>A portal should be developed, through which schools can log the queries they have, and the support/expertise they need and a facility to respond to provide this guidance/support/CPD. There are excellent supports available and more effort needs to be put into raising awareness of these supports and how to access them.</p> <p>Whole school or whole special unit training would be very beneficial with in relation to the various elements put forward - a similar approach to CPD provided in relation to the Leaving Certificate. Three or four half-day closures / 2 or 3 full-day closures to implement contents, assessment tools etc.</p>
<p>Additional comments</p>	<p>The level of consultation afforded to stakeholders in relation to the Guidelines is inadequate to enable any stakeholder to provide comprehensive feedback. By this, we mean that our feedback should reflect the breadth of opinion that would be surfaced had we had more time in the first instance, and had we been permitted to share the draft documents with practitioners working in the specific settings that are most affected by the Guidelines. More than 6,000 primary school leaders – principals and deputy principals - are IPPN members. To fulfil our mission 'to support and advocate for exemplary school leaders', our approach is to seek expert input from those members who work in specialist/relevant settings when providing feedback to education stakeholders. While the leadership team and other staff members do have expertise in many aspects of school leadership, the depth of knowledge required to do justice to the serious issues at stake in relation to special classes for ASD means that limiting consultation to the leadership team and staff is insufficient.</p> <p>We would strongly recommend that the Department and the Special Education Unit take some more time to get feedback on the Guidelines from practitioners who lead schools with special ASD classes and Autism units, so as to tease out the nuances of the guidelines and ensure that the language is appropriate, that all of the issues are addressed satisfactorily and, crucially, to increase the likelihood of buy-in and acceptance when they are launched and rolled out – as it can genuinely be said that those affected were consulted, or at least their input was sought. IPPN can facilitate this consultation process, through our network of members, and is at your disposal in this regard.</p>

Quite rightly, the DE and the NCSE are looking to find appropriate placement for pupils with ASD in primary schools, to urgently deal with the very large waiting lists around the country. Many schools have stepped up to open special classes and have found themselves in very difficult situations, with inadequate supports, staffing, training, accommodation and/or funding to adequately meet the needs of the pupils enrolled. Urgent attention needs to be paid to committing to these resources UP FRONT, before a school commits to enrolling children. If Boards of Management, school leaders and SETs believed the resources would be available, there would be very little resistance to opening classes, and very little need for schools to be nominated by the minister to open them – a very adversarial and unattractive approach for all parties – parents, schools, the minister and the NCSE.

Of particular concern to IPPN is the feasibility of special classes in small schools led by teaching principals. Due to the enormous additional workload involved in opening (and running) special classes, IPPN does not consider it feasible for a teaching principal to lead schools with special classes. Put simply, administrative status must be afforded to school leaders with special classes – both incumbents and those who agree to set up new classes where the school doesn't already have one. The provision available up to the early/mid 1990s in relation to this needs to be reintroduced urgently. In addition, administration time is required, with substitute cover, to facilitate the SET/DP to complete the work outlined in Part B, and to lead the special classes more generally, if they have responsibility for same. All schools with special classes need additional release time, those led by teaching principals need more.

The work that is underway to employ therapists (speech & language, occupational, behavioural and other) and ring-fencing them specifically for the schools' sector is welcome and overdue. Having sufficient capacity for all schools is a key issue that needs to be resolved to safeguard the provision for pupils with ASD in their local school into the future.