



**IPPN Submission –
Draft DEY Circulars on
Assessment of Need and Behaviours of Concern**

Prepared for:
The Department of Education & Youth

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1 ASSESSMENT OF NEED

1.1 PROCESS

IPPN acknowledges that the AON process is a statutory one under the Disability Act (2005) with the legal responsibility resting with HSE. IPPN remains gravely concerned that the backlog in AON Reports may well reach a total of 20,000 in the coming school year, and this places a great burden on schools and school leaders, both in terms of completing forms and awaiting the completion of the AON Report before services can be provided for the child.

IPPN is satisfied that the HSE will lead the process through its Assessment Officer who will, if necessary, and through the NCSE, request an education service to be provided. The NCSE will nominate an appropriate person to carry out this request.

IPPN acknowledges that the judge in a recent court case has upheld the fact that teachers are suitably qualified to undertake the completion of the Assessment of Need Form. The DEY has confirmed this judgement and instructed that, where such a request is made, the Principal teacher will undertake to have this form completed by an appropriate member of staff.

1.2 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1.2.1 SENCO

IPPN asserts yet again that the role of the Special Education Needs Co-Ordinator (SENCO) in a school should be a recognised post providing oversight of all SEN provision in the school, including the school/parental completion of all forms and documents such as the AON Form.

Resources, such as the availability of support from the NCSE by phone or in person, are very welcome but there is concern that the capacity of the NCSE to deliver to schools may be a significant constraint.

IPPN is in agreement that all schools, through the Continuum of Support, should have the required Student Support Plans as evidence of the education profile of the child when completing the AON Form.

1.2.2 Role Of School

IPPN is satisfied that the role of the nominated person in the school is to assist the HSE Assessment Officer with the education report, identifying the needs of the child as well as the services required, regardless of the constraint of costs, availability or capacity. IPPN is concerned that such services may not be available for the child, placing an even greater burden of expectation on the school in their provision for the child over which the school often has little or no control. This includes the lack of availability of specialist placements, and lack of access to therapeutic services.

1.2.3 Role of NCSE

Does NCSE have the capacity to accede to all requests for support from schools? School leaders report that the phone lines in NCSE are not answered in a timely manner. This is of concern when schools are seeking support for this process.

IPPN acknowledges the supports available such as the Padlet and FAQ document.

1.3 APPENDIX 1 - IMPORTANT NOTES

It needs to be explicitly stated that normal school closures cannot be used as grounds for a school to be unable to complete the assessment of educational needs

1.4 APPENDIX 2

Should include all supports and services that could be deemed to be potentially required in a 'gold standard' assessment of need.

2 BEHAVIOURS OF CONCERN

Our feedback in relation to this draft circular is presented in a series of comments or clarification questions pertaining to specific sentences or paragraphs that could be answered within the circular text in that part of the document.

2.1 TRAINING

“Schools will have access to online webinars, and face-to-face information sessions in Education Centres, if required.”

All relevant webinars that have previously been rolled out need to be available to schools when engaging in this process.

“Specialist training for special classes in mainstream schools will commence in September 2025. This will be on a ‘train the trainer’ basis where a teacher in a school will receive training and will become an accredited trainer for their school.”

- Will sub cover be provided to avail of this training?
- It needs to be more than the “Train the Trainer” approach. At least two members of staff should be trained to guard against capacity being lost, if one person goes on leave, if indeed staff can be identified to be trained to be the point person for this in schools.
- There is a reference to ‘other staff’ receiving training. How will they be identified/prioritised?
- What does BOM training look like? One person should have to attend face-to-face training and then a webinar should be available and mandatory for all BOM members to see and engage in a process of discussion on implementation and implications for the school.

2.2 OVERSIGHT

- What does BOM oversight of behaviour look like?
- When reports are sent to NCSE, it should be clear what happens to that information. Is it reported to DEY? Is it available under FOI?

- A promotional campaign for teachers, school leaders and Boards is required to ensure awareness of all the available NCSE and NEPS supports and training including those listed in the circular:
 - a. Relate Model of Support
 - b. Supporting Autistic Students in Special Schools
 - c. Attention Autism
 - d. Fundamentals of Structured TEACCH
 - e. SCERTS
 - f. DIR Floor-time
 - g. The Power of Play
 - h. Trauma Informed Practice - The Stress Factor, Getting the Balance Right.

2.3 PHYSICAL RESTRAINT

“Schools will be required to report any instances of the use of physical restraint to the NCSE from September 2025”

Is there a specific form for this? What type of information is required?

2.4 INSPECTION

“Line sections within the Department will be formally requesting the inspectorate to undertake thematic inspection work in the area of behaviour.”

What will this involve? What will schools be required to provide?

2.5 COMPLAINTS

“There may be instances in which some parents are still not satisfied despite having followed the school’s complaints procedure. In these circumstances, parents will have access to a designated portal which will enable them to bring their complaint to the Department for consideration.”

- It would be helpful to clarify the process around this e.g. where does it fit with the existing complaints procedures, and with the OCO processes, and what its focus will be.
- It would also need to be clarified what role the school has in this, if any.
- From the school Board’s perspective, will compliance with the complaints and child protection procedure and the guidelines relating to behaviours of concern be sufficient?

- Will this group be allowed to bring in other elements that are not covered by mandated procedures?

2.6 CODE OF BEHAVIOUR

“The Board of Management [...] must prepare, make available and publish a school code of behaviour (Section 23 of the Education Welfare Act, 2000 as amended Admission to Schools Act 2018, Section 10a), which must adhere to the National Educational Welfare Board (Tusla) document “Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for School” (NEWB, 2008). As part of its work in this area, boards of management are strongly encouraged to develop a policy on use of physical restraint.”

The timing of this should be included. We believe that it will be late 2027.