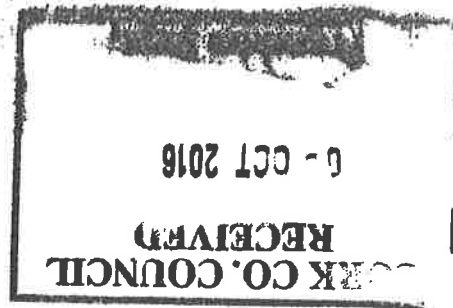




Oifig an Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna
Office of the Minister for Education and Skills

Ms. Nicola Radley
Senior Executive Officer
Cork County Council
County Hall
County Cork



PLEASE QUOTE REF NUMBER ON ALL CORRESPONDENCE.

Our Ref: 1603543 /AM

SH October 2016

Dear Ms. Radley,

I refer to your recent correspondence to the Minister for Education and Skills, Mr. Richard Bruton TD, in relation to ASD provision at secondary level in Cork.

This Government is committed to ensuring that all children with Special Educational Needs, including those with autism, can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

Such placements facilitate access to individualised education programmes which may draw from a range of appropriate educational interventions, delivered by fully qualified professional teachers, with the support of Special Needs Assistants and the appropriate school curriculum.

There are approximately 14,000 students with ASD in the school system.

- 63% are educated in mainstream classes
- 23% are educated in special classes in mainstream primary and post-primary schools; and
- 4% are educated in special schools

We now have the highest level of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support, Resource Teaching allocations and Special Class provision that we have ever had, which will ensure that children with special educational needs including Autism can continue to participate in education and be supported in a manner appropriate to their needs.

The Minister announced that from September 12,900 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) will be available for allocation to primary and secondary schools, which is 860 more posts, or a 7% increase in the number of posts over which were available last year. In total, the number of SNA posts available has increased by almost 22% from 10,575 posts, available in 2011. About 69% of all students with ASD access SNA support.

In addition, there are currently over 11,800 learning support and Resource Teacher posts in mainstream primary and post primary schools providing additional teaching support to pupils with special educational needs. About 25% of all resource teaching posts are allocated for ASD.

In respect of children with ASD who cannot be accommodated in mainstream education, they may be enrolled in special classes or special schools where more intensive and supportive interventions are provided.

As previously advised the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), for allocating resource teachers and special needs assistants to schools to support students with Special Educational Needs, including Autism.

It is also the role of the NCSE to make appropriate arrangements to establish special classes in schools in communities where the need for such classes has been identified.

Special classes within mainstream schools are intended for children who, by virtue of their level of Special Educational Needs, cannot reasonably be educated in a mainstream class setting, but who can still attend their local school in a special class with a lower pupil-teacher ratio of 6:1 at primary level and 6:1.5 at post primary level, and also have Special Needs Assistant support normally amounting to 2 SNAs for a class of 6 children.

Progress in developing this network has been significant and in addition to the special school placements there are currently over 1,000 special classes throughout the country at primary and post primary level of which 765 are for children with Autism.

The NCSE recently published a list of special classes for the 2016/17 school year. In total there will be 1,153 special classes available this year, which is an increase of over 100% in the number of special classes which were available in 2011, which was 548.

The NCSE has advised that for this school year there will be 127 early intervention classes, 525 primary ASD classes and 237 post-primary ASD classes, which represents an increase of approx. 16% on 2015/16 classes for children with autism.

Of these there will be 145 ASD classes in Cork City and County, including 24 Early Intervention Classes for children who are not yet school going age, 80 primary school classes and 41 at post primary level in mainstream schools. 18 of these classes are new classes due to open in September 2016, 11 in primary schools and 7 in post primary schools. This will result in the provision of 144 places in early intervention classes, 480 places for primary school pupils and 246 places for post primary pupils.

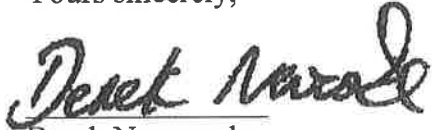
Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs, including those in Cork City and County, are available on www.ncse.ie in county order, with new classes identified

The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 which was published recently. The Bill will bring tangible benefits to all parents. The Bill will include measures which would oblige all schools to admit pupils where there are available places.

The Bill will also include measures to provide for a situation where a child (with special needs or otherwise) cannot find a school place. The proposed measures will allow the National Council for Special Education or Tusla to designate a school place for that child

I hope this clarifies the position.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Derek Newcombe". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "D".

Derek Newcombe
Private Secretary

