



Minister of State for Special Education, Josepha Madigan and the Department of Education have published [Circular 0002/2024](#) which details changes to the model for allocating Special Education Teaching (SET) hours.

The circular changes how the educational profile for primary schools is determined and therefore, the SET hours allocated.

Neurodiversity Ireland has serious concerns about the sustainability of this method for provision of appropriate support to all students who have additional educational needs.

Due to the apparently unreliable nature of HSE CDNT data on "complex needs" Minister Madigan has removed that factor as a criterion for the allocation of SET hours. This will necessarily impact the most vulnerable children - namely those with "complex needs." Neurodiversity Ireland understands that the Department of Education seeks to separate a child's educational needs from "care needs" whereas that is highly problematic, if not impossible, for a child with the greatest degree of support needs.

The Department points to the increase in special classes and school settings as the means by which those children should be facilitated. This contradicts the ethos of the largely dormant EPSEN Act 2004 and means that children with complex needs will be segregated from their mainstream peers.

The Department ignores the recent NCSE publication [Pathways to Inclusive Education](#), which advocates for a system which supports all children to be able to access mainstream education. The Department is removing the needs of the child from their calculation, undermining the State's requirement to implement child-centred, rights-based supports in the [UNCPRD](#).

Nessa Hill, Director of Neurodiversity Ireland, expressed concerns about the consequences of this circular on children with the greatest support needs who will no longer be factored into the equation when NCSE allocates SET hours to schools, due to the removal of that factor by Minister Madigan and the Department of Education. She went on to say that by allocating hours based on the numbers of children in school, the level of disadvantage of the area in which the school is based and the literacy and numeracy profile of the school, the Department is automatically excluding from its

criterion, those children with complex disabilities which require support to ensure they can continue to access the curriculum. Children who have a high degree of support needs (for example, a dual diagnosis of autism and ADHD) who are currently performing well *due to the provision of SET support* will no longer be eligible for assistance on the basis of the new allocation model. This will have a knock-on effect for the entire mainstream school body as children who would previously have been supported with SET hours will now have to go without. The Department asserts that schools will determine how their hours are allocated *within* the school which places the principal in the invidious position of having to determine whose needs are greatest or most pressing.

The Department should be required to explain why children with greatest support needs no longer deserve the support they need. By saying that the failure of HSE's Children's Disability Networks to collect accurate data on the nature, extent and type of support needs means that those needs must be excluded from the Department's calculation, Minister Madigan is punishing some of the most vulnerable children in society because of her own government colleagues' statistical incompetence.

Neurodiversity Ireland calls on all its members to contact their local TDs and Senators to seek confirmation that the circular will be revised to reinstate the criterion of "complex needs" and seeks an urgent response from the Department of Education that it will not proceed with its flawed method of distribution of educational assistance.

Further, Neurodiversity Ireland calls on the Department of Education to overhaul the system of qualification for teachers at all levels, to ensure that all teachers are qualified to teach to the 30% of children in their classroom who are neurodivergent.