



Customer Charter

National Council for Special Education

November 2009

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Customer Charter

National Council for Special Education

This Customer Charter describes our role and sets out the service standards that we will apply for all our customers and all those with whom we come in contact.

What we do

The core functions of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) are to:-

- **provide on behalf of the State, local and national services including information to support special education provision;**
- **undertake research;**
- **provide policy advice to the Minister for Education and Science; and**
- **undertake other specific functions set out in the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004.**

The NCSE is committed to a special education system that is person centred, family focussed and responsive to the needs of all.

Our customers

Our customers include-

- **children with special educational needs and their parents and guardians;**
- **school management, Principals and teachers and other education service providers;**
- **health professionals and other health service providers;**
- **voluntary organisations supporting persons with special educational needs;**
- **the Minister for Education and Science;**
- **the Health Service Executive and other agencies responsible for related services;**
- **the Council and staff of the NCSE.**

More about us

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is an independent statutory body with responsibility and authority prescribed by law.

The NCSE was established under the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 (EPSEN Act) on 1st October, 2005. A summary of the functions of the NCSE is given in appendix 1.

The NCSE includes a Council and an executive. The Council of the NCSE comprises a Chairperson and 12 other members who have a special interest in or knowledge of special education and who are appointed by the Minister for Education and Science for a 3 year term.

The executive are the staff of the NCSE and comprise a Chief Executive, other head quarters management and administrative staff and SENOs (Special Education Needs Organisers) who are locally based throughout the State.

Implementation of the EPSEN Act, 2004

Certain provisions of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004 (EPSEN Act) are currently in effect and arrangements for the implementation of further provisions are under consideration by the Government, but have been deferred for the present in the light of economic circumstances.

When the EPSEN Act is fully implemented we will assume further duties and obligations in relation to and including the assessment and placement of children with special educational needs and the development and monitoring of their individual education plans. We will comply with these obligations.

Our local services

Our local services are provided by a network of Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs). Each school in the State has access to a dedicated SENO. The SENOs give advice and support to schools in providing services for children with special educational needs.

Our SENOs sanction additional resources, within Department of Education and Science policy guidelines, for schools to support them in providing for the additional requirements of children with special educational needs.

We issue a detailed resource allocation circular to schools each year. The circular sets out the policies and procedures for the allocation of additional resources to schools for the special educational services that they provide for

their pupils. The circular also explains the time lines, forms and other procedures for schools in applying for resources to provide these services. You can get a current copy of our circular from your school, from our web site www.ncse.ie or from your local SENO.

Applications for additional resources are made by schools to their designated NCSE SENO. We aim to make decisions/recommendations on complete applications and reply to schools within 6 to 8 weeks. Where there is a SENO vacancy or a prolonged absence we will make arrangements for a service to be provided to that area through other means which we will notify to the schools concerned.

More about our local services

We deal with the following resource allocation functions:

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Resource teacher supports➤ Special needs assistant supports➤ Assistive technology➤ School transport➤ Placement |
|--|

Resource teacher supports

- processing applications from all schools for resource teacher support in respect of children with low-incidence disabilities (such as moderate general learning disabilities, visual or hearing impairments, physical disabilities or autism) and deciding on the level of support appropriate to the school;
- processing applications from second-level schools¹ for resource teacher support in respect of children with high-incidence disabilities such as mild general learning disability and deciding on the level of support appropriate to the school;

Special needs assistant supports

- processing applications from schools and deciding on the appropriate level of special needs assistant support for children with disabilities;

Assistive technology

- examining applications from all schools for special equipment/assistive technology;

Transport

- examining applications from schools for transport arrangements for children with disabilities and making recommendations to the Department of Education & Science;

¹ Allocation of resources in respect of primary level pupils with high incidence disabilities is dealt with by primary schools within the general allocation model.

Placement

- **helping identify the appropriate educational setting for individual children with special educational needs.**

Our research

In undertaking research, we consult with stakeholders to identify relevant and priority research relevant to special education needs and provision in Ireland. We use open and transparent methods of commissioning research and we publish and disseminate research findings.

Our policy advice

It is the responsibility of the Minister for Education and Science to determine the special education policy within which we must operate. We have a role in providing advice on policy to the Minister. Our policy advice to the Minister is based on research findings, our operational experience, and the views of stakeholders. Our advice takes into account the financial resources available to the State and the practical implementation of that advice. We will provide policy advice having fully considered and analysed the issues.

What we cannot do

Our mission is to ensure that appropriate educational services are provided for all persons with special educational needs. We cannot act outside the policies and procedures prescribed by the Minister for Education and Science. We cannot in individual cases act outside the national strategies, rules and policies which we prescribe to ensure equitable, fair, effective and efficient responses for all, within the resources available. We will provide accurate and relevant information to our customers and will publish this information in so far as possible. We cannot meet all individual information requests.

Data and application processing

We will provide a computerised administration system and ensure that data on special education provision are available and that applications for resources are processed as efficiently and effectively as possible. We will process data in accordance with the Data Protection Acts.

Consultation with our customers

We have established a Consultative Forum, which is representative of our stakeholders and which we use to seek views on major issues. We will continue to use this forum. In addition we will meet with national organisations representing Parents, Schools, Teachers, Disability Bodies and other State Agencies on a regular basis to seek their views and provide information on the supports for children with special educational needs. Through our local staff we communicate and consult with all those who use our services. We welcome feedback on our services.

Our commitment to quality customer service

This charter sets out the standard of quality service we aim to provide for you, our customer. Copies of this charter are available from our staff at our offices and on our website.

We will provide a single point of contact at local level for those needing and providing special educational services. Each school has support from a designated SENO. The names and full direct contact details of our SENOs are set out in our local contact directory which is available on request and on our website www.ncse.ie.

Our SENOs will meet with parents, school staff and other professionals supporting a child with special educational needs. Our SENOs will explain their role and the policies they are required to implement. Our SENOs will familiarise themselves with the needs of the child in the school situation and will explain the basis of decisions.

We aim to deliver a local, accessible, personal and timely service. We will do this efficiently and effectively. We guarantee to respect the rights of all parties in the delivery of the service.

Contact us by telephone, post or by e-mail for local services

Our local service is delivered in the local community.

Each SENO has a designated phone number with a voice mail facility, together with a postal and e-mail address where s/he may be contacted directly. As Special Education Needs Organisers spend a considerable amount of time visiting schools they will not be always available to take phone calls. Our SENOs will access their voice mail on a daily basis. We will ensure that customers leaving messages receive a response within a reasonable period.

We will give you our names when we answer your call, and will be courteous and helpful to you at all times.

Contact us by telephone at our head quarters

We will answer calls as quickly as possible and provide a voicemail service. Our office hours generally are *Monday to Friday, 09.15hrs – 12.45 pm and 2.00 pm – 5.30 pm*

When you leave a message on our voicemail we will aim to ensure that you receive a prompt call back.

We will give you our name when we answer your call, and will be courteous and helpful to you at all times.

If we cannot answer your query in full, we will try to put you in contact with someone who can assist you, or take your details and call you back as soon as possible.

Correspondence by letter, fax or e-mail

We provide clear information on how you can directly contact, by post, fax, e-mail as well as by phone, the relevant NCSE staff who will help you.

We acknowledge correspondence, keep you informed of progress in so far as possible and we aim to issue a final reply on a timely basis.

We will communicate clearly, providing you with a full response to your queries.

Personal contacts

We deliver our local services in the community. We will arrange to meet you by appointment at agreed times in locations which are as convenient as possible- such as schools, education centres and health centres.

We will provide you with the maximum level of privacy possible.

We also provide facilities, including video and telephone conference, for meetings in our head quarters office and we will ensure that these facilities are clean, accessible and maintained to an appropriate standard of efficiency, comfort and safety.

We will be friendly, helpful and courteous in our dealings with you.

Service through Irish

We will ensure that people who wish to conduct their business through Irish are facilitated, and we will respond in Irish to correspondence received in Irish. We will respond in Irish, to telephone callers who wish to speak in Irish, immediately where possible, or offer to have the call returned promptly by a member of staff who can deal with the query in Irish.

We publish our Annual Report, Strategy Statement, and Customer Charter in both Irish and English. We comply with the requirements of the Official Languages Act, 2003.

Provision of information

We will aim to provide clear, accurate and relevant information to all our customers through direct contact with our staff, our publications, and our website.

We will comply with the Freedom of Information Acts and the Data Protection Acts. We will give reasons for our decisions

We will ensure that our more important public information material is available in both electronic and print format.

Accessibility

We are committed to providing a service to customers that upholds your rights to equal treatment established by law.

We provide equality of access to our services, accommodating those covered by the nine grounds identified in equality legislation.

We will ensure that our services and facilities are accessible to all our customers, including those with special needs.

The NCSE Access Officer will arrange extra help if necessary for people with disabilities who wish to use the NCSE's information and services including our local services. Contact details for our Access officer are available on our website and in Appendix 3 to this charter.

Our SENOs will also assist persons with special educational needs arising from disabilities in accessing information and appropriate educational services in their areas.

Quality of service

We are committed to providing the best possible service for our customers. We welcome your help in providing this service by making any comments, suggestions or complaints about the service you receive, or the way in which it is delivered.

Code of professional practice for SENOs

We have an agreed code of professional practice for SENOs. This is published on our website.

Appeals procedures

We have procedures for review and appeal of our decisions in relation to the allocation of Resource Teachers and Special Needs Assistants to schools to support the education of children with special educational needs. These procedures are available on our website, in schools or from any point of service delivery.

Comments and complaints

We welcome your comments and suggestions on this Charter and on how we can improve our service in the future. We have clear procedures for dealing with customer complaints. We also have separate decision appeals procedures.

We would encourage our customers to raise any issues or complaints with the relevant NCSE staff member involved or with his/her direct supervisor. We would hope that most issues will be efficiently and satisfactorily resolved in this way. Where it is not possible to resolve issues, we have formal complaints procedure. Full details of our comments and complaints procedures are published on our website and are available at any NCSE office.

You may contact the office of the Ombudsman for Children (www.oco.ie) if you are unhappy about our decision in relation to a particular child. You may also contact the Ombudsman (www.ombudsman.gov.ie) if you are dissatisfied with the services of the Council.

You may use appeals mechanisms provided under the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 if the matter refers to an entitlement under that Act.

Co-operation with schools and other agencies

NCSE and its staff recognise that the provision of special educational services requires effective co-operation with schools and other agencies. We have a central role in developing this co-operation. We have developed protocols on co-operation with school managements and the management of other agencies. Copies of these protocols may be viewed on our website.

Child protection policy and procedures

We have developed procedures in line with the Children First guidelines for our staff who may encounter child protection issues. Our staff guidelines are published on our website.

http://www.ncse.ie/publications/Child_Protection_Guidelines.asp

Help us to help you

You can help us to give you a high quality service if you:

- quote any relevant reference number in all communications with us;
- give full relevant information on a timely basis as required by your school or your SENO;
- contact your local school directly where it would be in a position to deal with your query;
- if you have internet access, check our website www.ncse.ie for information you may need;
- e-mail or write to our staff directly using the direct e-mail and contact details we have provided on our website and with this charter;
- call our staff directly using the designated personal phone number contact details we have provided on our website and with this charter;
- if our lines are busy or unanswered please use our voicemail and leave your name and number so we may call you back;
- make an appointment to meet our local staff when you need to meet us;
- if you wish to make a complaint consult our guidelines and procedure, be as specific as possible and differentiate between complaints about policy and staff conduct;
- treat our staff courteously, as you would wish to be treated yourself;
- make comments or suggestions about the service you receive.

Where you can get more information

Further information about our services may be obtained on our website www.ncse.ie or by contacting us directly.

How to contact us

Our up to date contact details will be maintained and available on our website.

A list of SENO contact details is also available on our website and from our staff at our offices. Our current contact details are attached in appendix 2.

The general functions of the Council as set out in Section 20 of the EPSEN Act, may be summarised as follows.

- **Planning and co-ordinating provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs.**
- **Disseminating information on best practice concerning the education of children with special educational needs.**
- **Providing information to parents in relation to the entitlements of children with special educational needs.**
- **Assessing and reviewing resources required by children with special educational needs.**
- **Ensuring that progress of students with special educational needs is monitored and reviewed.**
- **Reviewing education provision for adults with disabilities.**
- **Advising educational institutions on best practice.**
- **Consulting with voluntary bodies.**
- **Advising the Minister for Education and Science on matters relating to special education.**
- **Conducting research and publishing findings.**

In addition the Council has specific functions in relation to the core provisions of the Act such as assessment of special educational needs and individual education plans for persons assessed as having special educational needs.

In carrying out its functions under the Act the Council is required to consult directly with stakeholders as necessary and to establish a formal national Consultative Forum representative of all the stakeholders

Appendix 2 NCSE HQ contact details

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National Council for Special Education
 1-2 Mill St
 Trim
 Co Meath

Fax: 046 9486404
 Tel: 046 948 + Extension number (as below)

Key Functions	Telephone Ext. Please dial 046 948 + required extension below	E-mail
Local NCSE services	6442 / 6432 / 6431	ops@ncse.ie
Accessibility	6410	accessofficer@ncse.ie
Accommodation & Services (incl purchasing)	6411 / 6412	accommodationandservices@ncse.ie
Finance	6443 / 6413	finance@ncse.ie
Freedom of Information	6412	foi@ncse.ie
Human Resources	6410	hr@ncse.ie
Information Technology	6446	it@ncse.ie
Policy	6475	policy@ncse.ie
Press	6480	press@ncse.ie
Research	6453/6465	NCSEResearch@ncse.ie
General	6400	info@ncse.ie