



Circular 0024/2025

To the Management Authorities of Primary Schools

Criteria for Enrolment in Special Classes for Children with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) or Speech Sound Disorder (SSD)

This Circular supersedes Circular 0038/2007 and the accompanying conditions and regulations applying to the enrolment in Special Classes for Children with Specific Speech and Language Disorder (SSLD). These special classes will now be known as Special Classes for Children with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) or Speech Sound Disorder (SSD).

1. Purpose and background of this circular

The purpose of this circular is to advise schools with special classes for children with developmental language disorder (DLD) or speech sound disorder (SSD) of unknown origin of the Department of Education's revised criteria for enrolment in these special classes.

This circular has expanded on the existing definition of Specific Speech and Language Disorder (SSLD) together with the associated criteria for enrolment in these classes as per circular 0038/2007, to ensure that the children with the highest level of need may be enrolled.

It is recognised that, in any provision using eligibility criteria, there may be people who do not meet these criteria. Children who do not meet the criteria outlined in this circular, will attend mainstream classes with the support of mainstream class teachers and special education teachers. The teachers will collaborate to identify and use a range of evidence-based interventions, decided at school level, using the Continuum of Support framework's problem-solving process.

2. Special classes for children with DLD/SSD

Special classes for children with DLD/SSD are attached to mainstream primary schools. Applications to establish such classes are considered by the special educational needs organiser (SENO) and those meeting the criteria for establishment are approved by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).

The following conditions apply to these special classes:



- A full-time teacher is assigned to each class, and classes operate with a reduced pupil-teacher ratio of 7:1, with SNA support allocation of .33.
- A minimum number of five eligible children is required for a school to retain a DLD/SSD class.
- Eligible children may spend up to two years in such classes. Where a second year is required, reapplication is not necessary to access the class.
- An enhanced capitation grant of €960 is paid in respect of each pupil enrolled in these classes.¹

The Health Service Executive (HSE) funds the provision of speech and language therapy services for the children attending these classes. It is expected that speech and language therapy services will be provided locally to children in these classes by the HSE.

3. Criteria for enrolment

Children who meet the following criteria may benefit from the intensive and collaborative approach to meeting their therapeutic and educational needs that is offered in a DLD/SSD Class.

1. The child has a conclusive diagnosis by a Speech and Language Therapist of:
 - a) Developmental Language Disorder where:
 - i. there is evidence of significant and pervasive needs evidenced by response to intervention and assessment over time including, use of speech and language assessment tools, observation in both clinical and social environments and assessment for risk factors and clinical markers and monitoring of responsiveness to intervention
 - and**
 - ii. language scores at or below a standard score of 78 (-1.5 SD from the mean)²

¹ The enhanced capitation grant amount is subject to change in line with the relevant circular, currently Circular 0056/2024.

² It is important to note and acknowledge that formal assessments may be inappropriate to use with multilingual populations and therefore a standard score on a formal language assessment may not be available in this context. The use of standardised tests (where appropriate) in conjunction with non-



and/or

- b) Speech Sound Disorder (SSD) of unknown origin diagnosed by a Speech and Language Therapist where there is evidence of significant and pervasive impact of the SSD of unknown origin on learning, literacy and social relationships evidenced by response to intervention and assessment over time including, use of speech and language assessment tools and observation in both clinical and social environments.

AND

2. The child has complex or severe educational needs as a result of their DLD and/or SSD of unknown origin that are pervasive in nature and require the integrated and targeted educational and therapeutic supports of a special class for children with DLD/SSD. Supporting evidence should include:
 - a) Evidence that despite targeted and intensive therapeutic and educational supports, the child's DLD and/or SSD of unknown origin continues to impact on their learning, participation, socialisation and well-being in their current educational setting.
 - b) Evidence of engagement with therapy input including response to and impact of intervention across impairment, functioning and participation over time through Speech and Language Therapist review.
 - c) Education documentation from schools or early learning and care settings including Student Support Plans and/or Access and Inclusion Profiles detailing:
 - Regular reviews of needs as part of an ongoing cycle of assessment and review with parents and educational staff
 - Target-setting
 - Evidence-informed intervention and review at key points.

standardised tests and other considerations as in point 1.a.i must be given detailed consideration in the diagnosis of DLD for multilingual children by the assessing Speech and Language Therapist.



4. Spare capacity

In instances where there is spare capacity in a DLD/SSD class due to insufficient eligible children (i.e. fewer than 7 children), the board of management may offer a place to a maximum of two children who do not meet all of the eligibility criteria but who could benefit from enrolment in the class for one year on a concessionary basis. Such placements must be supported by the recommendation of a speech and language therapist and a diagnosis of DLD/SSD of unknown origin. The continued enrolment of these children for a second year can only be considered once all eligible children have been accommodated. The NCSE through the local SENO will monitor such situations.

5. Transport

In general, a child who is eligible for placement in a DLD/SSD class on the basis of the provisions in section 3 or section 4 above is also eligible for free transport to the DLD/SSD class nearest to his or her place of residence, subject to the terms of the School Transport Scheme.

6. Support for children with DLD-SSD in mainstream classes

Any child who meets the criteria outlined in section 3 of this circular qualifies for teaching support from a Special Education Teacher (SET) where s/he is not enrolled in a special class for DLD/SSD.

Children who have been identified with DLD/SSD will be supported by their class teacher and special education teacher/s through the provision of additional targeted special education teaching resources allocated to the school as detailed and advised in Department Guidelines. Furthermore, the Department advise where recommendations are received from private or community based Speech and Language Therapists they are incorporated into the student support plans.

While initially, the NCSE's Educational Therapy Support Service (ETSS) will work in the Western and greater Dublin regions, over time, the ETSS will be available to provide additional supports to schools who in turn support students with DLD/SSD educational needs who are not enrolled in special classes.



7 School plan

It is recommended that the school plan contains details of how the DLD/SSD class is organised and operates in the school. This should include:

- a) a statement on how the class is organised,
- b) class objectives,
- c) the roles and responsibilities of those involved,
- d) the policy on staff collaboration, and
- e) the policy on inclusion of children with DLD /SSD within the wider school population.

8 Admissions Committee

Applications for enrolment to these classes, based on a referral from a Speech and Language Therapist, will be considered by an Admissions Committee (AC). The AC meets to discuss all referrals and to make recommendations to the Boards of Management (BOM) regarding the possible offer of available places in the DLD/SSD classes to appropriate candidates. While the AC may recommend placement, the BOM retains ultimate responsibility for offering/refusing enrolment places.

The AC comprises the following:

- a) School Principal of the DLD/SSD Class.
- b) HSE Speech and Language Therapists/Manager for the DLD/SSD Class
- c) DLD/SSD Class Teacher.

The parents/guardians of successful applicants are notified in writing by the relevant school principal with an offer of a DLD/SSD class placement for their child for the following academic year.

Applicants may not be offered a place in a DLD/SSD class if:

- a) they do not meet the Department of Education's eligibility criteria, or
- b) there are insufficient places available to meet the demand. In this situation a prioritisation process is applied.



9. Training

A prioritisation matrix with associated guidance is available to assist in the prioritisation of places for children with the greatest educational needs and in line with the criteria. [Link to matrix and guidelines](#)

Aligned to the publication of the Circular, NCSE will provide information webinars on the change in criteria and guidance on the implementation of the prioritisation matrix for schools.

The online webinars will be available to all schools who provide DLD/SSD classes. Schools will receive notification from the NCSE of these sessions separately.

NCSE Speech and Language Therapy as part of the Educational Therapy Support Service (ETSS) provide a range of supports to schools through their regional therapy strand of support. These are designed to support schools and teachers in implementing supports for students with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) across the school environment. Schools may avail of a number of seminars to support students SLCN including a 2-day seminar on Speech and Language and Communication Needs for Primary Schools. Additionally, there are regulation, sensory and curriculum related seminars in place to support further professional learning. Seminars can be booked through <https://ncse.ie/tpl>.

10. Review of Circular

The criteria outlined in this circular and the operation of same will be subject to regular review.

Issued by: Brendan Doody
Special Education Section

Date Issued 20 March 2025