

Minister O'Sullivan announces allocation of resource teacher support to children with Down Syndrome

Interim allocations to be made pending the introduction of a new model of allocating additional teacher supports to all children with special educational needs.

The Minister for Education and Skills, Jan O'Sullivan, T.D., has today announced that Government has agreed that additional resources will be allocated to schools as an interim measure to support those children with Down syndrome, who are not already supported through the National Council for Special Education's (NCSE) annual allocation process.

The Minister is introducing this measure now in recognition of the length of time it will take to introduce the new resource teacher model which was recommended by the NCSE. Under the interim measure schools will receive 2.5 resource teacher hours per week for each qualifying child.

These supports are being provided in recognition of the fact that children with Down syndrome experience a cluster of difficulties relating to this syndrome, in addition to general learning difficulties, including speech and language developmental delays.

These interim allocations will remain in place until such time as the proposed new model for allocating teaching supports to children with special education needs comes into force. In early February, it was announced that it had not been possible to address fully some of the concerns relating to that new model, in time for it to be implemented from September 2015. The Department of Education and Skills is currently working to devise a pilot of the new model, which schools could opt into on a voluntary basis.

Commenting on the announcement, Minister O'Sullivan said: "I have had the opportunity over recent weeks to meet with Down Syndrome Ireland, and with different groups of parents of children with Down syndrome. It has been clear to me that the cluster of difficulties which children with Down syndrome face, require that some additional teaching supports be made available.

"Over the next couple of years, we will pilot and then implement a new model of allocating supports that will remove the need for parents to pay for assessments, and for children to receive a diagnosis in order to receive additional teaching support. In the meantime, I have decided that the needs of children with Down syndrome are sufficient to warrant an interim allocation.

I want to thank the parents who took time from their busy lives over recent weeks, to share their experiences with me. It is very clear to me that we have more work to do to alleviate the burden on parents, but I hope the allocation announced today will go some way towards allowing their children to reach their full potential."

While there are expected to be some additional costs arising from this decision, the Minister has made clear that any additional costs which arise during 2015 will be met from within the existing Budgetary allocation for 2015.

Information for schools on how to apply for these supports will shortly be available on the NCSE website – www.ncse.ie

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For further information, contact Paul Daly at 087 223 5187