



An Roinn Oideachais  
agus Óige  
Department of Education  
and Youth

# **2026 Summer Programme 'Building Confidence and Connections'**

## **Mainstream Primary Schools**

Overview – Terms and Conditions

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# Background

## Summer Programme 2026

This year's Summer Programme is building upon the programmes of the last 5 years. The main priority for the 2026 Summer Programme is to ensure pupils with the most complex special educational needs should have access to a school-based programme.

This year's programme is designed and developed to ensure supports are targeted to assist pupils with complex special educational needs. The 2026 Summer Programme for mainstream primary schools consists of two schemes:

1. The Primary School Scheme
2. The DEIS Literacy and Numeracy Summer Camp/Campaí Samhraidh.

The programme aims to support pupils' wellbeing through building their confidence and enhancing their sense of connection with their school and their peers. It also strives to support children and young people who are at key transition stages in their education to progress to their planned educational placement in September.

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated disruption to education has had adverse consequences for many children and their families, with a disproportionate impact on children with special educational needs and those at greatest risk of educational disadvantage. However, the programme is now entering its 5<sup>th</sup> year since the onset of the pandemic. Given the passage of time, where schools have remained open since, it is hoped that for the majority of children, the impact of pandemic-related learning loss has diminished significantly in the following years. Therefore, it is appropriate that the Summer Programme would target those students who remain most impacted when the school year finishes, where learning regression is possible and where this additional support provides as significant educational, social and emotional benefit. Therefore, in 2026, schools will be expected to prioritise supports for children in special classes, followed by children with the highest level complex special educational needs within mainstream classes.

The Department of Education and Youth encourages all recognised schools to run the initiative during the school summer holidays at a time that is suitable for staff and pupils.

The Department of Education and Youth is seeking the involvement of all primary schools in the provision of the 2026 Summer Programme.

### **The Department of Education and Youth Inspectorate**

Throughout the summer months of 2024, the Department's Inspectorate carried out a series of visits to a number of primary, post-primary and special schools as part of their evaluation of the Summer Programme 2024.

Among the main findings of the inspection visits were:

- Staff on summer programmes fostered good relationships with children and young people.

- The children and young people felt a sense of belonging and welcome in the school during the programme.
- The children and young people formed close friendships, strengthening their connection to the school community.
- The children and young people developed social skills such as appreciating differences and respecting diversity.
- Almost all teachers, principals, programmes organisers and managers felt that the summer programme made a difference to the children and young people when they returned to school in September.

The report “Building confidence and connections: Inspectorate report on summer programme 2024” was published in April 2025 and can be found [here](#).

In March 2026, The Inspectorate has published the Summer Programme Report 2025: *Confidence, Creativity and Connection Highlights from Summer Programme 2025*. This report presents examples of such activities that inspectors observed during visits to summer programmes in primary, post-primary and special schools and focused on five areas:

- promoting agency,
- exploring and learning in the local community,
- using digital technology,
- supporting educational transitions and
- responsive active learning experiences.

The examples in the report show clear commitment by programme organisers, managers and staff to providing experiences that help children and young people engage, succeed and progress. They illustrate an intentional approach that schools can adapt to suit their own context. The report provides advice for summer programme organisers and school staff who are preparing for the summer programme in 2026.

The link to the Summer Programme Report 2025 can be found [here](#).

### **INSPECTORATE INVITATION TO SCHOOLS**

If your school would like to explore how you might develop high-quality experiences for children and young people on your 2026 Summer Programme, the Inspectorate would be happy to support you with this process. If you would like to take up this offer please contact the Inspectorate at:

[Inspectorate\\_Summerprogramme@education.gov.ie](mailto:Inspectorate_Summerprogramme@education.gov.ie)

*Note:* school refers only to a school as recognised under Section 10 (3) of the Education Act 1998.

## Changes to the Summer Programme 2026

### Changes to the Online Application Portal

To support a smoother and more responsive application process this year, a few changes to the application process have also been introduced.

Schools will continue to express their interest in running a school-based programme in the same way as in previous years. Once an application is submitted, schools will receive an email acknowledging receipt.

In the week commencing **25 May 2026**, schools will be engaged with on an individual basis where they will receive a follow-up email confirming the number of pupils approved to participate in this year's programme, along with their school's assigned staffing allocation. This approach ensures that each school receives clear, tailored information to assist with effective planning.

In the interim, once the application process has been completed, schools are encouraged to begin planning on the basis that the special class groups will be accommodated. This will support timely preparation and ensure that programmes are ready to meet pupils' needs as soon as final confirmations issue.

### Opening and Closure of the Online Registration Portal

The Online Registration Portal will be open from **6 May 2026 to 15 May 2026**. Schools are asked to carefully note these dates as late applications will not be accepted. Once closed, the portal **will not be re-opened** again under any circumstance.

### The Home Based Scheme

Schools, where possible should maximise the filling of the class groups before consideration is given to applying for Home-based provision for any child.

For 2026, the Home-based Application Portal will be open in parallel with the School-based Application Portal.

### Requirement by schools prior to programme commencement

In June, schools may be contacted to provide a list of pupils who will be participating in the school-based programme. A template for the type of information required will be provided to schools in advance.

Pupils may take part in **one** school-based programme only. A child who participates in the Primary School Scheme cannot participate in the Literacy and Numeracy Summer Camps (or vice versa). Equally, pupils who are to take part in a school-based programme are not eligible for the home-based programme, even if they have attended only part of a school-based programme. This approach ensures that places are used to their fullest and that as many pupils as possible can access support under the Summer Programme.

## Theme for Summer Programme 2026

The theme for this year’s programme continues to be ‘Building Confidence and Connections’. It is widely acknowledged that experiences with peers constitute an important developmental context for children and adolescents. Peer relationships provide a unique context in which children learn a range of critical social emotional skills, such as empathy, cooperation, and problem-solving strategies. Peers, or a group of young people who have similar interests, age or background serve as an important source of information, feedback and support to individuals as they develop a sense of self.

The Summer Programme is intended to be an enjoyable experience for both pupils and staff. The range of activities should reflect this year’s theme and include opportunities for pupil-centred, play-based engagement.

Each school’s Summer Programme Organiser will be required to attend online training which will be facilitated by Tralee Education Support Centre. In addition, further opportunities for collaboration and sharing of experience will be facilitated for Organisers.

Supports, guidance and training material will be provided to schools and staff to help develop and deliver this year’s programme.

## School Meals Programme and Summer Programme

The Department of Education and Youth and the Department of Social Protection are working together on the continued availability of meals under the School Meals Programme for the school-based Summer Programme 2026. Once arrangements are finalised, eligible schools will be advised.

## What’s continuing for 2026

Previously there were separate schemes for the Inclusion Programme and Special Classes. The **Primary School Scheme** replaces and integrates both these schemes into one cohesive scheme for mainstream primary schools. It is still open to schools to offer places to pupils enrolled in special classes, pupils who have complex special educational needs in mainstream classes and those who are most at risk of educational disadvantage. Full details are in the primary school scheme section below.

This year’s programme maintains the **Organiser role**, which has replaced the preparation hours in previous years, to help support schools in their planning and participation in the Summer Programme. Also, the **Summer Programme Manager** role and the functions for this role remain largely the same as previous years. Further details in relation to these roles are provided in [Section 4](#) of this document.

There are two schemes available in the 2026 Summer Programme for **mainstream primary schools**

Summer Programme Schemes	Available to:
1. Primary School Scheme	All recognised mainstream primary schools (including schools with special classes and DEIS primary schools)

2. Literacy and Numeracy Summer Camp/Campai Samhraidh	All DEIS primary schools only
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**NOTE:** Where a DEIS primary school plans to avail of both the Primary School Scheme and the Literacy and Numeracy Summer Camp/Campai Samhraidh, **both schemes will run concurrently as in 2024 and 2025.** These schemes will be outlined in more detail in [Section 1](#) and [Section 2](#) of this document.

## Supports for schools to offer the programme.

A broad suite of supports has been put in place to encourage and facilitate schools to offer the programme. These measures are designed to provide flexibility and to assist management in relation to administrative tasks. The supports also include the earlier payment\* of school staff through ESINET and the provision of funding to schools to facilitate preparation, co-ordination and supervision of the programmes. Further details in relation to the ESINET payment process are available in [section 6](#) of this document.

With regard to staffing, newly qualified teachers and undergraduate student teachers who have registered with the Teaching Council under Route 5 are eligible to be employed on the Summer Programme. It is also open to schools to recruit appropriately-qualified staff for the role of SNA. Further details in relation to staffing are available in [Section 4](#) of this document.

The **Organiser** role was introduced in 2023 so that boards of management and school principals can assign responsibilities for programme planning and preparation at a much earlier stage in their school year. There is also a **Summer Programme Manager** role during the summer months when the programme is running in the school. Principals are encouraged to engage with staff members to take on these responsibilities to ease their own workload and to promote distributed leadership.

The Organiser and Summer Programme Manager roles provide an exciting professional opportunity for teachers to develop their leadership skills and to gain management experience both at a whole-school and career development level. These roles will be outlined in more detail in [Section 4](#) of this document.

While many principals may wish to continue with organising and running the programme in their schools, similar to previous years, the 2026 Summer Programme permits principals to delegate these functions to other members of staff.

**\*NOTE:** In 2025, 90% of staff who participated on Primary Schools scheme and the Literacy and Numeracy Camps/Campaí Samhraidh were paid via ESINET by the end of August. The Department will continue to endeavour to facilitate early payment for those that participate in this scheme in 2026.

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# 1. Primary School Scheme

## Pupil eligibility

**NOTE: It is important that schools strictly apply the eligibility criteria outlined below so that those children with the greatest level of need are prioritised to take part in the programme. The Department must ensure that provision is fair and consistent across all schools to maximise the use of resources available but will work with schools to help support the needs of the children with greatest level of need and those at risk of educational disadvantage in those schools.**

The Primary School Scheme is open to pupils enrolled in special classes, pupils who have complex special educational needs in mainstream classes and those who are most at risk of educational disadvantage.

Primary schools with special classes running a Primary School Scheme should prioritise those pupils in special classes when assigning places for their programme. All pupils attending special classes are eligible to participate in their school's summer programme.

Subsequent places can then be given to pupils with complex special educational needs in mainstream classes with the remaining places on the programme being offered to those at most risk of educational disadvantage.

In mainstream schools without special classes, the school-based programme will support pupils in groups of up to twelve children. In deciding eligibility for the programme, priority should be given to pupils with the most complex special educational needs in mainstream classes with the remaining places on the programme being offered to those at most risk of educational disadvantage.

For the purposes of the Primary School Scheme, pupils with complex special educational needs are defined as:

1. All pupils enrolled in special classes.
2. Pupils presenting with the most significant needs in mainstream classes in primary schools who are accessing the highest level of the Continuum of Support (School Support Plus) <sup>1</sup>. This will include a small number of pupils with enduring needs which significantly affect their capacity to learn, to function independently and to participate in education.

These pupils require highly individualised, intensive, targeted and additional teaching and learning supports as their special educational needs are enduring, and significantly impact on their learning and participation in the school environment. These pupils may present with the following:

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<sup>1</sup> See Guidelines for Primary Schools Supporting Children with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Classes for guidance in identifying and responding to pupils' needs as part of the Continuum of Support

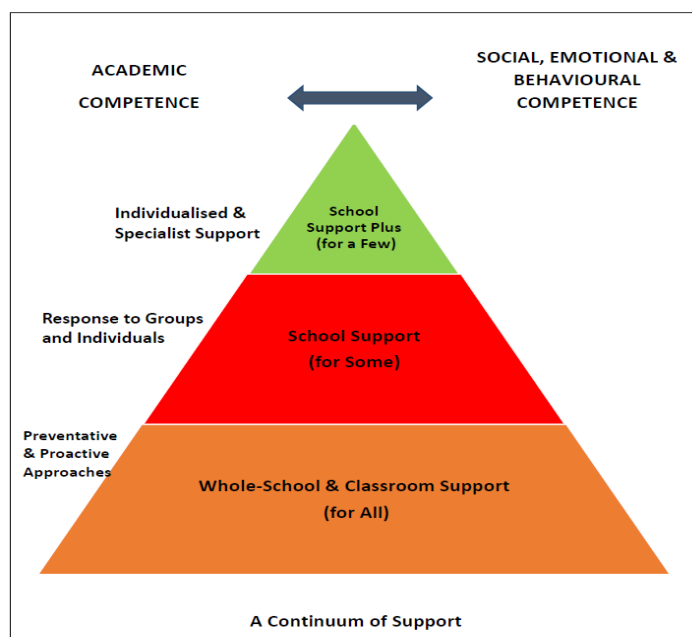
- [Guidelines for Primary Schools: Supporting Children with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Classes](#)

- Significant needs with physical and/or sensory functioning (including pupils who are Deaf or have severe to profound hearing loss and pupils who are blind or have a severe to profound visual impairment)
- Significant needs in cognitive functioning and independence/daily living skills (including pupils who have moderate to severe OR significant/profound learning disability)
- Significant needs in social communication, social interaction combined with rigid repetitive patterns of behaviour
- Autistic Pupils
- Pupils with Down syndrome
- Pupils with severe OR significant emotional behavioural needs to the extent that these behaviours of concern are impacting on a pupil’s ability to learn, to function independently and to participate fully in school life.

Children who meet the above criteria and are entering primary school in September 2026 are also eligible for the programme.

### **Continuum of Support**

The Department has set out the Continuum of Support framework ([available here](#)) to assist schools in identifying and responding to pupils’ needs. This framework recognises that special educational needs occur along a continuum, ranging from mild to severe, and from transient to long term, and that pupils require different levels of support depending on their identified needs. The Continuum of Support is a problem-solving model of assessment and intervention that enables schools to gather and analyse data, as well as to plan and review the progress of individual pupils. Using this framework helps to ensure that interventions are incremental, moving from class-based interventions to more intensive and individualised support, and that they are informed by careful monitoring of progress. The Department’s Guidelines for Primary Schools Supporting Children with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Classes ([available here](#)) provide guidance for schools in identifying and responding to pupils’ needs as part of the Continuum of Support framework.



The following is the criteria which can be used to identify and select pupils who they consider to be at risk of educational disadvantage.

- Pupils already identified by the school as being most at risk of educational disadvantage and at risk of early school leaving
- Pupils accessing SET or SNA school supports during the school year.
- The Primary School Scheme also offers an opportunity for schools to address the needs of migrant pupils such as addressing English language skills and integration, including pupils who have arrived in Ireland from Ukraine and other countries
- Pupils from Traveller and Roma communities

Schools are best placed and have the autonomy to determine which pupils are most likely to be at risk of educational disadvantage. Schools are also best placed to determine how this scheme will be run to meet the needs of their cohorts of pupils.

**Where a school is not running a Summer Programme or a place on a school-based programme is unavailable, pupils with complex special educational needs will be able to apply for the Home-based programme.**

## Duration of Scheme

The Primary School Scheme should run for at least 2 weeks and for a maximum of 4 weeks during the school summer holidays. The weeks do not have to be consecutive, the scheme is flexible to allow schools choose weeks which best suit their needs and staff availability. The programme cannot run on weekends or on a Bank Holiday.

## Staffing allocation - Number of groups

Pupils enrolled in special classes	Staffing (teachers and SNAs) is the same as the special class resource allocation which exists during the school year (e.g. Pupils are enrolled in a special class for children with Autism: the Pupil/Teacher ratio for these Summer programmes is 6:1 and two SNAs).
Pupils with complex special educational needs and/or pupils at risk of educational disadvantage enrolled in mainstream classes	Pupil Teacher ratio will be 12:1 and one SNA*
A combined group of pupils with <b>special class</b> placements and eligible pupils with <b>complex special educational needs and/or those at risk of educational disadvantage</b> who are in <b>mainstream class placements</b>	Staffing (teachers and SNAs) are the same as the special class allocation which exists during the school year (e.g. Pupil has a place in a special class for children with Autism: Pupil/Teacher ratio for the Summer programme is 6:1 and two SNAs).
<p>In the special class group or the combined group setting, for the purposes of the Summer Programme, schools have flexibility to consider how best to align the existing resource allocations to accommodate additional eligible children into these groups.</p> <p>It is expected, however, that children from special classes will be maintained within their special class group for the duration of the Summer Programme.</p>	
<p>*As the pupils taking part in the Summer Programme are a small subset of the overall school enrolment, the requirement for SNA support during the Summer Programme will be lower than the school's annual SNA allocation. Schools should be cognisant that SNA support provided is to support those pupils taking part where care needs might otherwise have inhibited their access to the programme.</p>	

## **Minimum pupil numbers required**

It is expected that there should be a minimum of 4 pupils in a special class group. For mainstream groups, schools are asked to make every effort possible in ensuring that the ratio of 12 pupils to 1 teacher is maintained. If schools have any queries in relation to minimum thresholds please contact [schoolsummerprogramme@education.gov.ie](mailto:schoolsummerprogramme@education.gov.ie)

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## 2. Literacy and Numeracy Summer Camp Programme/Campa Samhraidh

DEIS schools who participate in both the Primary School Scheme and the DEIS Literacy and Numeracy Summer Camp Programme/Campa Samhraidh **should run both schemes concurrently**. For example, if the Primary School Scheme is run in July, then the Literacy and Numeracy Summer Camp/Campa Samhraidh should also be run during the same period.

This coordinated approach aims to create a more inclusive learning environment for all pupils during the summer months, whilst also supporting pupils in the development and maintenance of positive relationships with their peers.

### Pupil eligibility

Schools are free to target the cohort of pupils they feel will benefit from the experience, taking due cognisance of the importance of early intervention and pupils' individual needs. Schools may allocate places to all pupils in the primary school, including 6<sup>th</sup> class pupils.

**NOTE:** Pupils enrolling in Junior Infants in September 2026 are **not eligible** to attend these camps.

### Duration of camps

Schools can choose to run up to 2 literacy and numeracy camps/campaí samhraidh of 1 week's duration each during the school summer holidays. The camps may not be run on a weekend or a Bank Holiday.

### Staffing allocation

**NOTE:** The DEIS Literacy and Numeracy Summer Camps is designed to support pupils who are experiencing social or academic difficulties in language and numeracy. **As SNAs are not allocated to Summer Camps**, schools are asked to give careful consideration to each pupil's individual needs. Where a child requires the support of an SNA to participate safely and meaningfully, the Primary School Scheme (where support is provided) should be considered as the more appropriate option. This ensures that every child is placed in the setting best equipped to meet their needs.

Schools who have 9 or more mainstream teachers can support up to 36 pupils per week, with each camp supported by 1 teacher for every 12 pupils. Schools who have 8 or less mainstream teachers may apply to run camps supporting up to 24 pupils, again with each camp supported by 1 teacher for every 12 pupils.

In the week commencing **25 May 2026**, schools will be engaged with on an individual basis where they will receive a follow-up email confirming the number of pupils approved to participate in this year's camp, along with their school's assigned staffing allocation.

All teachers working on DEIS Primary literacy and numeracy camps/campaí samhraidh must be fully registered with the Teaching Council.

The design of the Summer Camp, in line with the framework set out in the **Camp Handbook** will be decided by each school, based on its pupils' needs. The programme is funded to target educational and social disadvantage. It seeks to assist pupils who are experiencing social or academic difficulties in language and numeracy who would benefit from a week-long Summer Camp with a very favourable teacher-pupil ratio.

## Minimum Pupils numbers required

Schools are asked to note that camps must be comprised of a minimum of 12 pupils to be considered eligible to participate in the DEIS Literacy and Numeracy Summer Camp Programme/Campaí Samhraidh.

## Staff training

Training sessions for the delivery of the Literacy and Numeracy/Campaí Samhraidh Programme for DEIS primary schools will be hosted by Dublin West/Navan Education Centres. Further details will issue to all participating schools.

## 3. Application process

### Online Registration Portal

**NOTE:** The Online Registration Portal will be open from **6 May 2026 to 15 May 2026**. Schools are asked to take care account of these dates as late applications will not be accepted. Once closed, it **will not be re-opened** under any circumstances.

Primary schools that wish to participate in the 2026 Summer Programme must register on the Department's Online Registration Portal for Primary Schools.

The link to the portal will be communicated to schools by email.

Following application, an email will issue to schools acknowledging which scheme the school has applied for.

In the week commencing **25 May 2026**, schools will be engaged with on an individual basis where they will receive a follow-up email confirming the number of pupils approved to participate in this year's programme, along with their school's assigned staffing allocation.

### Resource Allocation Appeals – Primary School Scheme only

If a school has a query or wishes to appeal for additional staffing including SNA\* support, their Organiser should contact [schoolsummerprogramme@education.gov.ie](mailto:schoolsummerprogramme@education.gov.ie) setting out the basis of the appeal prior to the commencement of their programme.

Closing date for appeals will be communicated to schools when the registration portal opens.

\*Requests for additional SNA support will only be considered where the allocation remains within the school's annual allocation. Schools should be cognisant that SNA support provided is to support those pupils taking part in the programme where care needs might otherwise inhibit their access to the programme.

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## 4. Staffing Resources

The roles of the **Organiser** and **Manager** are not restricted to the school principal. It is encouraged that these roles are developed within the school to ease workloads

**These roles create new development and leadership opportunities for school staff and growth in distributed leadership within schools.**

### Organiser Role

The Organiser Role will carry a gross payment of **€2,000** for participating schools only, which can be claimed once their school's programme starts. The role of Organiser can be undertaken by any permanent or fixed term teacher, including the principal, in the participating school and should be limited to one person in the school. Where more than one teacher is interested in this role, it is the responsibility of the Boards of Management to select the most suitable candidate. The Organiser will undertake specific duties as outlined below.

Hours associated with this role should be recorded and may be used for some or all of the following activities:

- Engage with associated Summer Programme training provided by the Department and/or other agencies.
- Familiarise teachers/SNAs with guidance materials and resources provided by the Department.
- Recruit staff to work on the summer programme, both internally and externally.
- Where schools are using external staff, establish procedures to facilitate the sharing of relevant pupil information, appropriate planning documentation and details of school policies and procedures to new staff or to staff who are unfamiliar with the pupils.
- Work collaboratively with school personnel to identify the pupils who should participate on the school-based programme and communicate with their parents/guardians.
- Develop the school's summer programme and activities in line with this year's theme.
- Develop a timetable for the Summer Programme.
- Where required, make arrangements for transport.
- Ensure that accommodations (i.e. classrooms, school buildings) in the school are available for the duration of the programme.
- **New for 2026.** Provide, on request, the list of pupils participating in the Primary School Scheme and/or DEIS Literacy and Numeracy Summer Camps.
- Liaise with the school's Esinet Local Administrator to ensure they include external staff on the schools resource / staff list. This will need to be done before the Summer Programme Manager takes over.

Collaboration will be needed between the Organiser and the school's Summer Programme Manager prior to commencement of each scheme to support the delivery of the Summer Programme in the school. This handover of duties to the Summer Programme Manager is needed as part of the Organiser's preparation work.

## Summer Programme Manager Role

Each school must appoint a Manager for their overall Summer Programme. The role of Summer Programme Manager can be undertaken by any permanent or fixed term teacher, including the principal and Summer Programme Organiser in the participating school. It is recommended that this appointment be considered in the context of the person with the most relevant special educational needs (SEN) experience.

The role of Summer Programme Manager may be shared between more than one permanent teacher within the school, however, only one Manager can work in that capacity in the school in any one day. Each Manager will only be paid for the days/weeks of the programme that they work in the role.

The Summer Programme Manager is not permitted to participate in the programme in a teaching role as they will be responsible for managing and leading the programme within the school.

The role of the Summer Programme Manager is to manage/oversee the summer programme and they must be available for the full duration of the programme, either in the school or when accompanying the Summer Programme groups on excursions, in order to deal with any issues that may arise. The Summer Programme Manager role is not limited to, but will include the following duties:

- Acting as the point of contact for the Department and/or Education Centre and parents in relation to the Summer Programme
- Acting as the point of contact for the Inspectorate in the event of school visit during the Summer Programme.
- Acting in a liaison role with other staff members working on the programme regarding any issues they might be experiencing
- Establishing and ensuring that their programme operates within resources as sanctioned by the Department
- Where applicable, dealing with any issues relating to transport services for participating pupils
- Ensuring appropriate returns to the Department in respect of teacher, SNA, Organiser and Manager remuneration on or before published deadline dates
- Completing a short survey in relation to the Summer Meals Programme (where availed).
- Ensuring all staff involved with the payment process are issued with any relevant guidance documentation provided by the Department
- Submitting claims to the Department or Education Centre for grant payments and any transport costs
- Ensuring that any Summer Programme evaluation material is completed and returned to the Department, including online evaluation questionnaires

## Role of the Teacher

Ideally, schools offering the summer programme will be assisted by the participation of teachers who are familiar with the needs of the children or young people attending. Where teachers have this familiarity, it will be easier for them to establish learning priorities aligned to existing support plans and to prepare a programme of support designed to maintain connection to the school.

Where other teachers are employed, these teachers should seek access to the most recent support plan for the pupils to help with establishing learning priorities.

**NOTE:** Teachers should maintain a record of content and skills taught during the Summer Programme and provide a summary of this to the principal and the parents, as appropriate. **These records may be viewed by a member of the Inspectorate in a school visit during the Summer Programme (please refer to the document: Guidance on the 2026 Summer Programme for more information).**

## Role of the Special Needs Assistant (SNA)

Where possible, schools offering the **Primary School Scheme** should seek to secure the participation of SNAs who are familiar with the pupils who will be attending. The roles and duties of the SNAs during the summer programme should continue to be in line with roles outlined in the school's SEN policy and reflect existing care plans for the pupils. There should be a particular emphasis on attending to health and care needs and fostering independence.

**Note:** SNAs should not be recruited for the DEIS Literacy and Numeracy Summer Camps/Campaí Samhraidh

SNAs must be at least 17 years of age to work on the Summer Programme.

## Recruitment of external staff

Schools can employ teachers and/or SNAs from outside of their school if the staff normally employed by the school are not available for any/all of the summer programme.

Schools are advised to establish procedures to facilitate the sharing of pupil information, relevant planning documentation and details of school policies and procedures to new teachers or to teachers who are unfamiliar with the pupils. Further guidance will be provided to schools and their Organisers as part of supports for Summer Programme 2026.

The Teaching Council and Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN) will promote the summer programme with this year's graduate teachers, Professional Masters of Education (PME) student teachers and undergraduate students registered under Route 5 to increase the supply of available teachers this summer. More information is available for each category of teacher in the relevant sections below.

To help teachers and SNAs identify summer programme vacancies in schools, the IPPN has created Summer Programme Noticeboards. These noticeboards will be available in the coming weeks and can be viewed by creating an account on [www.educationposts.ie](http://www.educationposts.ie). This will help schools to find relevant staff in their local area.

**Schools must comply with standard recruitment and vetting procedures in the employment of all staff.**

## **Recruitment of graduate teachers**

Graduate teachers can work on the Summer Programme where they have commenced their registration process with the Teaching Council and where the following conditions are fulfilled:

1. They have received their final results from their HEI confirming they are eligible for registration with the Teaching Council
2. Garda vetting has been completed as part of their application for registration with the Teaching Council.
3. Their registration with the Council will be finalised prior to 2nd October 2026.

Teachers who meet the above conditions who have not completed their Teaching Council registration will be paid at the unqualified rate for their participation with the programme. Teachers who are registered under Primary Route 1 can only be paid the primary qualified rate from their registration date as advised by the Teaching Council.

## **Recruitment of PME student teachers**

A PME student teacher registered with the Teaching Council under Route 3 Further Education can work on the summer programme.

PME student teachers currently in Year 1 of the programme, who have applied for registration with the Teaching Council under Further Education, can be engaged by primary schools where the following conditions are fulfilled:

1. Garda vetting has been completed as part of their application for registration with the Teaching Council.
2. Their registration with the Council under Further Education will be finalised prior to 2nd October 2026.

PME student teachers who are registered with the Teaching Council under the Further Education route will be paid at the unqualified rate for work on the summer programme.

## **Recruitment of undergraduate student teachers**

A student teacher registered with the Teaching Council under Route 5 can be engaged by primary schools.

Undergraduate student teachers registered with the Teaching Council under Route 5 will be paid at the unqualified rate for work on the summer programme.

Graduate teachers, PME student teachers and Route 5 undergraduate student teachers will be paid in the same manner as substitute staff.

## 5. Staff Information

### Payment rates

Managers, teachers and SNAs who work on the programme will be paid for this work based on the rates they are normally paid during the school year, i.e. their personal rate.

Where a teacher participates in the programme **in the SNA role**, they will receive the SNA rate of pay.

### Substitute rates of pay

Contracted teachers and SNAs will be remunerated for their work based on the rates they are normally paid during the school year i.e. their personal rate. All others will be paid a daily/hourly rate of pay.

### Eligibility of teachers/SNAs on approved leave

A teacher or SNA who is availing of approved paid or unpaid leave from his/her employment during the period of the summer programme is not eligible to participate. However, a teacher or SNA who is on career break or who is job sharing may be employed as a teacher or SNA during the period of the programme. Job sharing teachers or SNAs can participate full time in the summer programme.

### Retired teachers

Teachers who have retired on medical grounds or Strands 1 and 2 of the Early Retirement Scheme cannot participate in the summer programme.

Teachers retired under Strand 3 of the Early Retirement Scheme may participate in the summer programme. Please note they are subject to the restrictions of the pension scheme governing their retirement.

## 6. Payments Process

Participating schools will utilise the Department's Esinet system to submit claims. This will allow claims to be processed on an ongoing basis during the summer.

The Department will endeavour to reduce payment times this year for all complete payment claims submitted before published deadline dates. The Department will process payments to teachers and SNAs as completed payment claims are submitted over the summer period through the Esinet portal.

The Principal or Local Administrator is to assign Summer Programme Data Approver and Summer Programme Data Entry roles within the school for the purposes of the summer programme.

The Summer Programme Manager is responsible for ensuring appropriate returns\* are submitted to the Department on or before published deadline dates. They must ensure that all staff involved with the programme are issued details regarding the payment process and are provided with any relevant guidance documentation provided by the Department.

It will be important that all payment claims are submitted by published deadline dates to ensure staff are paid on time. Schools should only submit their payment claims when their programme has concluded.

Guidance and support will be provided by the Department throughout the process. Further details on how claims can be submitted will be issued to participating schools in due course.

\*Appropriate returns include confirmation of pupil numbers per week of programme and/or the completion of the School Meals Survey on Esinet. Failure by the manager to submit the appropriate returns may result in the submission of their payment claim being delayed.

**NOTE:** In 2025, over 90% of staff who participated on Primary School scheme were paid via ESINET by the end of August. The Department will continue to endeavour to facilitate early payment for those that participate in this scheme in 2026.

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## 7. Additional Support

### Summer Programme Grant Payment

#### Primary School Scheme

A non-pay grant of €30 per pupil per week will be paid in respect of pupils participating in the Primary School Scheme.

The grant payment can only be processed **once the school** has completed the Pupil Number returns on the Esinet portal. Schools will be provided with full guidance on how to make this return.

Payments for this grant will commence in October 2026 for schools that have made this return.

#### DEIS Literacy and Numeracy Camps/Campaí Samhraidh

A non-pay grant of €30 per pupil per week will be paid to all schools participating in the DEIS Literacy and Numeracy Camps/Campa Samhraidh.

The funding for the DEIS camps will be made before the camps commence through the relevant Education Centre. The Education Centre will communicate directly with all schools that have registered on the Online Registration Portal.

### Transport

**NOTE:** If you require school transport services for children with special educational needs during the Summer Programme 2026, you must submit the School Transport Application Forms **before 15 May 2026** to ensure that the required transport can be arranged.

#### School transport for Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

School transport services for the Summer Programme 2026 may be available to pupils who normally avail of transport under *School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs* during the school year.

A family who is availing of a special transport grant during the school year may continue to do so if their child has been sanctioned to attend the Summer Programme in their school. Grants are paid in the normal manner upon receipt of a Statement of Attendance Form from their school.

When a school registers for the Summer Programme, where they require SEN Transport Services to continue, the **Summer Programme Organiser** must carry out the following:

- On registering for the Summer Programme, schools will receive a link to a School Transport Application form in their confirmation email.
- Complete the form fully for all pupils who are currently on SEN transport (pupils who avail of a Special Transport Grant do not need to be listed)
- Return the completed form to the Department's School Transport section via email to [SENtransport@education.gov.ie](mailto:SENtransport@education.gov.ie) **before 15 May 2026**.
- Any queries can be sent to [SENtransport@education.gov.ie](mailto:SENtransport@education.gov.ie)

All School Transport Application Forms must be submitted by the school before **before 15 May 2026** in order for transport to be in place for the Summer Programme 2026.

Escorts who are required to assist on existing SEN School Transport Services as outlined above should continue to be paid in the normal manner.

Only services who have received sanction for an escort by the Department during the school year will be funded in this regard.

Please note that only transport to and from the summer programme can be considered.

### **Mainstream School Transport**

It is important to note that the Department's Primary School Transport Scheme will not operate for the duration of the summer programme in 2026.

Where transport to and from the Primary Summer Programme is identified as a barrier for certain pupils to attend the programme, schools may make their own local transport arrangements and claim the associated costs from the Summer Programme Section of the Department up to a maximum of **€1,750** per week.

Transport should only be arranged for those pupils who are already availing of school transport under the Department's Primary School Transport Scheme. Please note that only transport to and from the summer programme is covered by this grant.

All claims in respect of transport costs must be accompanied by the following:

- the appropriate receipts e.g. private bus company receipts, taxi receipts;
- names of pupils who were provided with transport to and from the summer programme and;
- confirmation that they are currently availing of the Department's Primary School Transport Scheme (Bus Éireann school bus ticket ID number)

and submitted to [schoolsummerprogramme@education.gov.ie](mailto:schoolsummerprogramme@education.gov.ie) once the programme has concluded. All queries relating to the payment arrangements for **mainstream transport** should be sent to that email address. Payments will commence in October 2026 to schools that have provided the required information.

## 8. Further Information

### Child Protection

The child protection procedures for schools provide that boards of management must designate a senior full-time member of the registered teaching staff of the school as the designated liaison person (DLP) for the school. It is expected that the DLP will normally be the principal.

It is also the responsibility of the board of management to designate another member of the full time registered teaching staff of the school (to be known as the deputy DLP) to assume the responsibilities of the DLP, in the absence of the DLP. It is expected that, where possible, the deputy DLP will normally be a deputy principal of the school.

In order to ensure that duties arising under the various obligations of the school under Child Protection are met, it is important that there is no delay in reporting any child protection concerns that may arise.

In the event that the Summer Programme Manager is someone other than the Designated Liaison Person (DLP)/Deputy Designated Liaison Person (Deputy DLP), the DLP/Deputy DLP should be contacted immediately to deal with any child protection concerns that may arise.

If the DLP/Deputy DLP are not available to be contacted during this period the Board of Management/ETB should make arrangements to designate the Summer Programme Manager to take up the role on a temporary basis. This decision needs to be taken by the board of management and clearly documented in the board's minutes. The names of the acting DLP/DDLP need to be displayed prominently at the entrance/exit to the area of the school where the summer programme is taking place. Appropriate training for the acting DLP/DDLP needs to be undertaken for their roles prior to the commencement of the summer programme

It is important that there is absolute clarity in relation to the arrangements being used and that all staff including the DLP and Deputy DLP are aware of the limited and exceptional circumstances in which they are to be activated.

Procedures need to be in place to ensure that the anti-bullying policy and procedures are implemented/adhered to during the summer programme and that the principal of the school and the board of management are informed of any concern/incidents of bullying.

### Irish language

In Irish-medium schools, it is important that Irish is the working and communicative language of the summer programme.

### Public Health Guidelines

Schools are required to operate summer programmes in accordance with any current public health advice and guidelines. The most up to date information is published on the HSE website at: <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/covid19/>

## Length of school day

### Primary School Scheme

The length of the school day is aligned with the normal school day as outlined in Circular [11/95](#). A primary school day normally comprises of 5 hours and 40 minutes and this duration should be maintained for the operation of the Summer Programme.

For record-keeping purposes, on registering for the Summer Programme, schools will be required to confirm their normal starting and finishing times during the school term.

### DEIS Literacy and Numeracy Camps/Campaí Samhraidh

Activities for the DEIS literacy and numeracy camps will be provided for 22.5 hours over the course of the week.

- The starting time for a camp is to be no later than 10 am
- Four hours of instruction must be provided each day
- In addition to the four hours instruction, a total of 30 minutes is set aside each day for a fully-supervised lunch/break period

## Queries and Support

All relevant information and training resources for the summer programme can be found at this link: <https://www.gov.ie/Summerprogramme>

All other queries can be directed to [schoolsummerprogramme@education.gov.ie](mailto:schoolsummerprogramme@education.gov.ie)

A Summer Programme helpline is also available at 09064 84292, times and dates of availability will be published on <https://www.gov.ie/Summerprogramme>

NCSE provide resources to support the school-based summer programme. The resources support tutors to provide engaging learning experiences for pupils that focus on consolidating relationships with their schools, supporting physical, social and emotional well-being, developing resilience, building their confidence as learners and developing skills and routines to support successful transition into the next stage of their schooling. The resources will become available at this link:

<https://ncse.ie/summerprogramme> - following an information training webinar for teachers.