

# Why Change how Additional Teaching Resources are Allocated to Schools? Perspective of a Principal in a Large Urban School (non-DEIS)

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**ÁINE DILLON is principal of Scoil Bhríde JNS, Donaghmede which, while non-DEIS, has a substantial minority of children from socioeconomically disadvantaged groups as well as high numbers of children with special needs across all years of the school population.**

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In principle, the New Model for the Allocation of Special Education Teachers is an improvement on the current model. The allocation of hours should follow the needs of the child and, in addition, this model will give more discretion and autonomy to the Principal and special needs team. I give a cautious welcome to the “new model”. We will have six full-time posts and a shared teacher who will be available to us for a day every second week. Four of these teachers have post-graduate qualifications in SEN and two have worked in our ASD classes. The number and quality of teachers will allow us to serve the needs of our children better. In-class support and team-teaching will be easier to organise.

The SEN team join me in welcoming the additional autonomy the new model will bring and the certainty of the allocated hours over the next two years. However, there is the challenge of endeavouring to meet parental demands. While the vast majority of our parents, in particular those of children with special needs agree with interventions given by the school, the new model could lead to situations where expectations of parents based on historic allocations lead to demands that cannot be met. The responsibility to deal with such situations will then rest with the Principal. A well constructed, watertight SEN policy will be required to mediate these challenges.

The other areas of concern are the following:

- What will happen in two years time? We have few pupils with complex needs in our current cohort of Junior Infants and none, that I yet know of, in our 2017/2018 intake. Will there be a reduction in our 2019 allocation? Our school is expanding. We are steadily building to a 16 classroom school (from 12). Will our allocation in 2019 reflect this?

- The use of standardised test results: while Circular 0013/2017 assures us that improvements in standardised test scores will not impact on the school profile can we really be sure of this? If our scores improve, particularly at the lower end, will that not be a reflection of the work put in by the increase in allocated hours?
- Concern about the HSE involvement: The HSE will be involved through their early intervention programmes that assess children with disabilities / special needs from birth to 5. It is envisaged that children with complex needs will be receiving support from the HSE intervention teams or be on their waiting list. But can we be sure that this will happen? We already have a lot of children, particularly those with autism or behavioural difficulties on waiting lists for up to two years.

As I said at the outset of this response I welcome the new model in principle. It will take three to four years to see if it delivers all that it promises.

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