



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Guidance on the 2023 Summer Programme

For Mainstream Primary and Special Schools

Introduction

This guidance from the Department of Education provides a framework for the 2023 Summer Programme to support children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) and those most at risk of educational disadvantage. The initiative is aimed at addressing the ongoing impact of the disruption to learning which occurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It builds on the provision in the 2021 and 2022 Summer Programmes and on the July Provision programme which had been offered in preceding years.

Findings from Inspectorate visits to schools show that, similar to the experience in other jurisdictions, some children and young people were disproportionately affected in their learning. This impact was most noticeable amongst children with additional / special educational needs and those at risk of educational disadvantage. The interruption of the regular school routine, social interaction with friends and other school supports has presented a risk of regression in the learning, social and emotional development and wellbeing of these children.

In accordance with the 2021 and 2022 expanded Summer Programmes, the Department is offering;

- A school-based Summer Programme to all mainstream primary schools for children and young people with complex needs and those at greatest risk of educational disadvantage.
- A school-based Summer Programme for all pupils attending special schools
- DEIS Literacy and Numeracy Summer Camp/Campaí Samhraidh

These programmes are aimed at providing a holistic experience for pupils which will help them to develop and strengthen their connections with their school and their peers.

As outlined in the overview documents, the 2023 programme no longer offers separate schemes for the Inclusion Programme and Special Classes in mainstream schools. The **Primary School Scheme** replaces and integrates both these initiatives into one inclusive scheme for mainstream primary schools which accommodates pupils in special classes, pupils who have complex educational needs in mainstream classes and pupils who are most at risk of educational disadvantage.

This year introduces a new Special School Programme as a pilot initiative to ensure that there is a real focus on supporting special schools. This programme has been designed and developed to ensure supports are targeted to enhance the availability of a school-based programme for pupils in special schools.

The Summer Programme 2023

The theme for year's programme is '**Building Confidence and Connections**'.

This guidance provides a general instructional framework for school staff to assist in the design and delivery of the school-based Summer Programme. It affords school staff members the autonomy and flexibility to modify the programme to suit their particular school context.

The Summer Programme for 2023 is designed to address the on-going needs of the children and young people who are most likely to have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. The initiative aims to provide them with a high-quality opportunity to experience school life in a very supportive way through placing a particular emphasis on active and engaging tasks, positive learning experiences and on promoting wellbeing.

The Summer Programme is intended to be an enjoyable experience for both children, young people and staff. The range of activities should reflect this year's theme of "**Building Confidence and Connections**". It should include opportunities for pupil-centered, play-based engagement. The primary aim of the intervention is to help our children and young people to realise their potential, to be resilient in dealing with the normal stresses of their lives, to take care of their physical wellbeing and to have a sense of purpose, connection and belonging to their school community.

Key Themes of the Guidance Document

- Rationale and aims
- Selection of participants
- Programme content
- Use of technology to support engagement
- Learning to learn
- Assessment of children and young peoples' needs
- Teaching approaches
- The role of Organiser and Programme Manager
- The role of teachers and SNAs
- Pupil voice
- Parental engagement

Rationale for Providing a Summer Programme

Children and young people with complex special educational needs and those most at risk of educational disadvantage have experienced a disruption to their education in a very significant way due to the impact of Covid-19. This impact is likely to be further

compounded by the learning disruption that typically occurs for them during the school summer holiday period. The OECD (2022)¹ recommends that education systems avail of all opportunities to place a particular focus on **strengthening learner resilience and wellbeing** when addressing the impact of the disruption to education as a result of Covid-19.

Aims of the Summer Programme

The key principles and approaches outlined in this guidance document are intended to assist teachers in providing a school-based programme to support children and young people to move forward in their learning by “**Building Confidence and Connections**” through

- Consolidating relationships with their schools, their teachers and their peers.
- Consolidating their prior learning, their readiness for learning and, to the extent that is possible, reduce regression in learning.
- Developing resilience and experience of wellbeing by promoting a sense of safety, calm, connectedness, self-efficacy, and hope.
- Developing skills and routines to ensure they successfully transition into the next stage of their schooling.

Who Should Be Invited to Take Part in the School-based Programme?

All children and young people attending special schools or special classes are eligible to participate in their school’s Summer Programme. In these settings, the Summer Programme will run for between **two** and **four** weeks during July or August and up to five weeks in special schools.

In special schools all children and young people are eligible to participate in the programme.

Primary schools running a Primary School Scheme should first give priority to those pupils with the most complex special educational needs, including pupils in special classes, when assigning places for their programme.

A home-based programme will only be available for children and young people with complex special education needs where their school is not running a Summer Programme or place on a school-based programme is unavailable.

In mainstream primary schools, teachers should consider the needs of the following groups and prioritise places for those with the greatest needs. The needs of refugee

¹ Addressing learning gaps now will minimise disruption in pupils/young people’ educational journeys | Lessons for Education from COVID-19 : A Policy Maker’s Handbook for More Resilient Systems | OECD library (oecd-ilibrary.org)

pupils should also be examined as part of the 2023 selection process. The following table may be useful to schools in establishing priorities:

Area of concern	Level of concern				
	Low			High	
	1	2	3	4	5
Pupils in special classes					
Pupils with complex special educational needs in mainstream classes					
Pupils most at risk of educational disadvantage					

These areas of concern can be further broken down using the selection criteria identified in the Overview document. The Overview document is available at www.gov.ie/summerprogramme

Programme Content

In line with the aims of the programme, programme planning should be informed by the following guiding principles.

Promoting a sense of SAFETY

Promoting a sense of safety helps children believe that their needs will be met now and in the future and that they are protected from harm.

The following can help promote a sense of safety:

- Routines create a sense of safety by providing predictability. Establishing routines will contribute to a safe and calm learning environment and give children a sense of security.
- It is recommended beginning with familiar learning activities and revision before progressively introducing new materials.
- There should be a focus on consolidating familiar routines in relation to school attendance and engaging in learning activities to facilitate a sense of safety for the child or young person.

Promoting a sense of CALM

The ability to calm ourselves and regulate our emotions is a fundamental element of wellbeing. The more regulated and calm we are, the more we are able to think, plan, engage and learn and the less stressed we will feel. Engaging in enjoyable and relaxing activities helps reduce stress.

The following can help promote a sense of calm:

- Activities like circle time, small group session, art and music may support children's sense of calm.
- Children and young peoples' experiences over the past two years are unique and varied. Some may verbalise their concerns, others may withdraw or present with behaviours which challenge. It is important to recognise and acknowledge that a wide variety of reactions can be expected and these are normal reactions to abnormal events.
- Establish regular rituals within the day e.g. greetings and goodbyes, regulation activities and transitions between activities.
- Use visual systems to signal expected behaviours e.g. where to line up, one way systems. Use visual and auditory signals to help prepare for transitions e.g. music for lunch breaks, count down timers for completion of work.
- Consider ways to create a calm environment in the classroom using, for example, lighting, music, objects such as blankets, cushions, sensory toys etc.
- Create safe spaces in and outside of the classroom to help children regulate, for example, calm corners, tents, relaxation spaces, sensory rooms etc.
- The opportunity to engage in quiet rhythmic activities like walking, or yoga can be calming for some children and young people.

Promoting a sense of SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Promoting social connectedness involves having relationships with others (individual or groups) who understand you and support you. Building connections and relationships with teachers and peers provides the basis for engagement, emotional wellbeing and readiness to learn.

The following can help promote a sense of social connectedness:

- Teachers and SNAs should take the time to build good relationships with children and young people by warmly welcoming them to the programme, listening to them and letting them know they are there to support them.

- Creating opportunities for children and young people to engage with creative, fun, high preference activities along with teachers and SNAs and other children and young people will be an essential aspect of the 2023 Summer Programme. Important social and life skills can be targeted as part of same.
- Arranging more group work activities than might normally be possible during term time.
- Supporting children to form friendships by providing lots of structured group activities within the class and during break times.

Promoting a sense of EFFICACY in SELF and COMMUNITY

Self-efficacy is the belief that you can do what you need to do, deal with challenges and handle tough times. Community efficacy is the belief that the school community you belong to can do what it needs to do to thrive and take care of its members. Feeling that you belong to a community that is supportive, can protect and promote wellbeing.

The following can help promote a sense of efficacy in self and community:

- Learning activities should be tailored to needs, linked to interests, underpinned by teaching strategies that take account of learning styles and individual needs and allow children and young people to experience success. Positive feedback, encouragement and affirmation will enhance their sense of self efficacy. This supports wellbeing, and enhances connectedness with learning and the school.
- Give children plenty of opportunities to play. Play is ‘the work of the child’ and provides children with opportunities to express their feelings and deal with their emotions. Some children may cope by re-enacting experiences through play or through their interactions with others. Provide opportunities for them to engage in creative activities through music/sport/ drama.
- Building on children’s strengths, providing choice and including their preferences when planning activities.
- Try to provide some choice in their day e.g. seating, activities, jobs. Allow flexibility in how they can interact with learning materials.
- Teaching strategies to regulate emotions and manage anxiety will help children and young people to cope with any worries and anxieties that they may feel about school. The emphasis here will be dependent on individual needs and based on individual experiences. Work to support children and young people in regulating emotion and managing with anxiety should build on and complement previous work to support them as detailed in their school support plan.
- Developing a sense of community by enabling children and young people to take an active role in the class by including them in planning and delivering enjoyable group activities (e.g. Art, Drama, PE).

Promoting a sense of HOPE

A sense of hope is related to fostering resilience and the expectation that things will work out for children and young people in the school community. The following can help promote a sense of hope:

- Teachers should reassure children and young people with calming, hopeful messages about what the school, teachers and others are doing to make the school community a safe and happy place.
- Positive reflection on things that children and young people enjoyed during the Summer Programme itself should be encouraged. Talking about these examples of resilience can be healing and reassuring.
- Children's and young people's participation in the Summer Programme will involve structured, predictable separation from parents/carers and will help to prepare them for their transitions in September. Supportive engagement with routines with an emphasis on fun, high-preference learning activities can help shift the focus away from any feelings of distress and allow children and young people to enjoy the present moment and look forward with optimism.
- Mark the end of the day with an acknowledgment of effort, progress and expectation for continued progress.

Teachers should adopt a flexible and child-centered approach when planning a programme for participating children and young people. Therefore, it is paramount that the programme planning builds on the individual strengths, interests and priority needs of each participating child by **collaborating with parents** and **enabling the voice of the child**.

Where children and young people are transitioning to a new educational setting, support for the transition should be a specific focus within the Summer Programme support plan.

Use of technology to support engagement

Some children and young people with complex educational needs may use assistive technologies and devices such as alternate keyboards, voice recognition software, monitor magnification software and text to speech options, to maintain, or assist them with learning, communicating and interacting. When engaging with children and young people around the Summer Programme, assistive technologies and devices may assist children and young people with complex educational needs by:

- Supporting learning (e.g. using a laptop to research, using spellcheck, text reading or speech recognition software, providing practice and consolidation opportunities).
- Supporting transitions to post-primary settings (e.g. calendars, schedules, alarms, organisational apps).
- Supporting communication (e.g. various software, messaging apps).

- Increasing social opportunities (e.g. social media apps).
- Reducing stress (e.g. music players, calming apps).
- Supporting recreational interests (e.g. researching areas of individual interest).
- Translating conversations into/from the pupil's mother tongue where they are beginning to learn English as an additional language.

Learning to Learn

In order to support children and young people who may have experienced interruptions to the continuity of their learning due to the periods of remote teaching and learning or the Ukrainian and refugee crisis, it will be very important for teachers to focus on skills associated with learning to learn.

Suggestions for supporting children and young people with additional needs or those most at risk of educational disadvantage during the Summer Programme include:

- Working to consolidate routines that help children and young people to succeed in daily school life.
- Building upon social skills and self-regulation strategies for the school context.
- Focusing on developing effective task and organisational skills.
- Reinforcing communication skills and approaches to ensure that children and young people can indicate choices and give their opinions.
- Reflecting on past successes (particularly those documented in the pupil support files) and how these were achieved to help children and young people to become more aware of their existing good strategies.
- Modelling the use of metacognitive strategies by providing children with opportunities to talk about how they are learning, what helps them learn best and give them opportunities to present learning in a variety of ways.

Teacher professional learning and resources for the Summer Programme are available on the NCSE website at <https://ncse.ie/summer-programme>

Assessment of and Young Peoples' Needs

A **pre-programme survey** should be issued to teachers, children and their parents/guardians to establish the child's priority learning needs, strengths, interests and how they could be best supported. In some cases, children or young people with significant additional needs may require other ways of expressing their interests, strengths and learning needs. This should enable teachers to individualise support by devising a Summer Programme Support Plan. Consideration should be given to including key aspects of literacy and numeracy into the plan together with supports for social development and enjoyable activities across various other areas of the

curriculum. The challenge and pitch of the plan should be realistically achievable within the short timeframe of the programme.

At the end of the programme parents/guardians should be provided with an overview of their child's progress and a record of their learning. The school should also retain this record of learning and ensure that it is used to inform approaches for the child or young person in September 2023.

Where a child or young person is transferring to a different school, this information should be retained by the parents/guardians and provided to their class teacher/year head when the transfer occurs. This will help inform future educational planning for the 2023/24 academic year.

Teaching Approaches

When devising the programme, effective pedagogical approaches will be key to supporting children and young people to achieve and to experience success.

Guidelines for effective teaching approaches:

- Use visual structured teaching approaches, including schedules to help understanding of the structure and sequence of the day.
- Focus on play and activity-based learning.
- Use of outdoor environments
- Focus on oral-language activities
- Clearly identify of the needs of the children or young people.
- Provide clear learning intentions and time for reflection on learning.
- Scaffold the development of knowledge and skills.
- Let children and young people know that it is not only acceptable to make a mistake but it is a fundamental step in the process of effective learning.
- Ask open questions.
- Provide wait time for thinking and answering questions.
- Use graphic organisers and mind maps.
- Use technology wherever possible and appropriate.
- Provide opportunities for the child or young person to work collaboratively with peers in the digital setting.
- Provide regular opportunities to support improvement in oral language development by providing opportunities for children and young people to share their learning and to engage purposefully in talk and discussion
- Promote opportunities to engage in autonomous learning.

- Provide regular feedback to encourage the child or young person.
- Use quizzes and competitions to encourage motivation and make learning fun.
- Provide opportunities to consolidate and reflect on learning.

The Role of the Organiser and Programme Manager

The 2023 Summer Programme introduces a new **Organiser role** to help support schools in their planning and participation in the Summer Programme. Also, the title of the Overseer role is changing to **Summer Programme Manager** role.

Organiser

In 2023, instead of preparation hours, there will be a dedicated role of School Organiser in each school offering the Summer Programme. The School Organiser will receive additional remuneration for their role. This is envisaged to be a key leadership role that will offer development opportunities for staff in schools. In special schools, this role will attract additional remuneration in recognition of the complexities of organising the programme in that environment. The School Organiser in all schools will develop the school's Summer Programme and have responsibility for recruitment of staff. As part of the pilot programme in special schools, the School Organiser will have the support of the National Coordinator service, in this regard.

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

The Summer Programme Manager role is a change in title from the Overseer Role last year. The role of the Summer Programme Manager in ensuring successful outcomes for participants is paramount. This role can be undertaken by any permanent or fixed-term teacher, including the principal and/or Summer Programme Organiser in the participating school.

At the end of the programme, the Summer Programme Manager should ensure that summary information on the child's progress is retained in the school to help with the continuity of learning in September. In addition, the principal of the school should ensure that optimal use is made of available supports to enhance the learning for children and young people and that key learning priorities should be established for each child or young person. A detailed outline of the role of the Summer Programme Manager is

provided in Section 4 of the 2023 Summer Programme Overview for Mainstream Primary Schools.

The Role of the Teachers

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 which are focused on maintaining and consolidating connections to the school. Where other teachers are employed, teachers should seek access to the most recent support plan for the child or young person to help with establishing learning priorities. Teachers should maintain a record of content and skills taught during the Summer Programme and provide a summary of this to the school or the parents, as appropriate.

The Role of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)

Where possible, schools offering the Summer Programme should seek to secure the participation of SNAs who are familiar with the children and young people attending the school-based programme. The roles and duties of the SNAs during the Summer Programme should continue to be in line with roles outlined in the school's Special Educational Needs' Policy (SEN) policy and reflect existing care plans for the children or young people. There should be a particular emphasis on attending to health and care needs and on fostering independence.

The Voice of the Child or Young Person

Involving children or young people in setting learning targets and in monitoring their progress, can be empowering and motivating for them. Some may have language and communication difficulties, therefore it is important to use appropriate means to enable them to communicate their views and to provide their input (e.g. use of visual supports, choice boards, assistive technology). Adopting a child-centered approach which places the individual at the centre of educational planning helps to ensure that their specific learning and wellbeing needs are addressed. This process enables the child or young person's voice to be included in the planning and decision-making process in relation to their path through education.

When engaging with children and young people around the Summer Programme, schools should listen to input regarding:

- The activities in which they engage
- The nature and level of adult support
- The use of technology to support learning
- The social aspects of their education (managing their emotional state, managing transition or change).

- Regular feedback should be provided to children and young people in relation to their progress during Summer Programme activities.

Parental Engagement

Parental engagement is critical in enhancing outcomes for children and young people and for achieving the aims of the Summer Programme. An effective means of communication which encourages and enables parents to share their views and concerns regarding their child's transition into the education setting for the next school year supports parents to contribute to their child's education.

When engaging with parents around the Summer Programme, schools should:

- Involve parents in the identification of their child's unique strengths, interests and needs, and in setting learning objectives.
- Engage with parents in planning for transitions, including transitions into/out of school and across settings.
- Seek and encourage the views of children and young people as well as parents when selecting activities and teaching approaches, as appropriate.
- Work in partnership with parents to maximise positive outcomes of the Summer Programme for children and young people.
- Provide reassurance to parents that every effort will be made to support their children to successfully reintegrate/transition into their planned education setting for the next school year.
- Provide reassurance to parents that their children will be encouraged and supported in their learning where there is a risk of regression in learning.
- Engage with parents in supporting their children to maintain a regular school routine.

Evaluation of Summer Programme 2023

Special Education Section will request the Inspectorate to visit schools to monitor Summer provision in a sample of schools. These visits will inform the compilation of a composite report which will focus on three key areas of provision;

1. The inclusion of children with the most complex special educational needs in the Summer Programme?
2. The extent were the activities of the Summer Programme were:
 - Well-planned
 - Aligned with the theme of building connections and confidence
 - Designed to meet the holistic needs of the children and young people
3. The connections between the Summer Programme and school provision.

During an inspector's visit to the Summer Programme, the inspector will ask to see the **school's provision plan for pupils / students with special educational needs'**. The school provision plan template is contained on p. 29 primary p. 35 (post-primary) of the [Guidelines for Primary Schools / Students with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Primary / Post-Primary Schools](#).

The inspector will meet with the programme manager, visit the range of activities, discuss the provision with the teachers and engage with the pupils on their experience of the initiative.

Conclusion

The guidance in this document is designed to support teachers across all settings including special schools, special classes and mainstream schools. The general approaches outlined in the document are intended to guide the provision of enjoyable learning experiences and realistic learning outcomes for children and young people over the relatively short duration of the programme.

All schools retain flexibility and autonomy to design learning programmes appropriate to children's needs and their particular educational setting. It will be particularly important for schools to engage with parents/guardians so that expectations about the nature of the child or young person's programme are agreed in advance and that good communication is maintained throughout the programme. To support continuity in the child's learning, the outcomes of the programme for each child or young person should also be shared effectively in written form with the school and the parents in a timely manner.

Through the delivery of Summer Programme 2023, principals and teachers should strive to support the targeted children or young people to consolidate their engagement in learning and social activities and to build their "**Confidence**" in preparation for a smooth transition to their new classes in September 2023.