Appointment of Special Needs Assistants

A Manual for Boards of Management

St. Senan's Education Office, November 2010

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NB: **A Special Needs Assistant should only be appointed to a post which is to be filled within the allocation of posts approved by the SENO acting on behalf of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).**

Step 1: Advertising

1. A recruitment advertisement for the position of Special Needs Assistant should contain the following information;

   - School Name
   - School Address (applications should be addressed to the Chairperson c/o of the school).
   - School Roll No.
   - Type of school - co-educational, all boys, all girls.
   - If the school is a Gaelscoil this should be stated.
   - School Category - special school, mainstream, mainstream with special classes.
   - School's Patronage - Catholic under the patronage of Bishop's Name.
   - Title of Vacancy - Special Needs Assistant
   - Status of post - permanent, fixed term (temporary), full-time, part-time (the no. of hours per week should be stated if the post is part-time).
   - Closing date for applications - **recommended, a minimum of 7 days from the last date of publication of the ad.**
   - Commencement date.
   - General description of the duties of the post.
   - Application Requirements - letter of application, curriculum vitae, copies of any educational qualifications listed in CV, names and addresses of a minimum of 4 referees (at least two of which are professional / work related, and two character referees).
   - The ad. should also state that a panel of suitable applicants may be formed from which future SNA vacancies arising during the school year will be filled.

2. **All advertisements must receive prior approval from St Senan's Education Office**. You can email the proposed advertisement to gwen@ldo.ie or fax a copy to 061 310186.

2. Upon approval the **advertisement must be** placed in a **local newspaper.**

Applications should be date stamped as they are received and kept intact for the selection board to open after the closing date.

Step 2: The Selection Board

1. The Selection Board for the position of Special Needs Assistant must be composed as follows;
   - The Chairperson of the BoM
   - The Principal Teacher of the school
   - One (1) Independent Assessors appointed by the Patron (schools should contact St. Senan's Education Office tel. 061 317742 in order to have an Independent Assessor appointed).
   - Gender balance must be maintained (i.e. either one female or one male must be on the selection board).

2. The Patron's written approval of the composition of the selection board must be received prior to the holding of the interviews. This approval may be applied for by contacting St. Senan's Education Office.

3. If any member of the selection board discovers that they '**stand in relationship**' to a person who is a candidate for the position they must disclose this information to the BoM and withdraw from the process immediately. The term 'stand in relationship' may apply to blood, marriage or business relationships. If there is any uncertainty regarding this matter please contact St. Senan's Education Office for further advice.

4. On approval the entire selection board should be involved in all activities pertaining to the appointment - opening and short listing of applications, marking matrix, etc.

Once appointed and approved the selection board acts independently of the BoM. Minutes of all selection board meetings should be kept on record.

Step 3: Preparation for Interview

1. Minimum Eligibility Criteria for the Appointment of a Special Needs Assistant

To be deemed eligible to apply for the post of Special Needs Assistant a candidate must at a minimum have an award of Grade D (or pass) in Irish, English and Mathematics in the Intermediate Certificate/Junior Certificate or the Day Vocational Certificate Examination or in an examination of equivalent standard.

2. First Meeting of the Selection Board

The first meeting of the approved selection board should be scheduled to take place after the closing date for the receipt of applications. The following business must be conducted at this meeting:

i. Establish an Applicant Assessment Criteria

- Prior to opening/reviewing the applications the Selection Board should familiarise themselves with the job description and the person specification of the ideal candidate to fill the post (see Appendix 1 - *Special Needs Assistant Sample Job Description & Person Specification*).
- The Selection Board should establish criteria for assessment of the applicants and the Chairperson should retain records of the criteria for assessment.
- The criteria for assessment should be arrived at following discussion of applicant eligibility, essential skills and abilities required to do the job and the additional desirable and advantageous skills and abilities which would be an added bonus.
- A list of interview questions based on the assessment criteria should be prepared and noted (see Appendix 2 - *Sample Interview Questions: Special Needs Assistant)*
- A marking sheet based on the established criteria and an assigned weighting for each criteria should be agreed on.
- A cut off point below which a candidate is deemed to be unsuitable should be set.

ii. Establish a Short Listing Process

- Prior to opening/reviewing the applications the Selection Board should agree on a short listing criteria and marking scheme (see Appendix 3 - *Special Needs Assistant Short Listing Criteria*).
- The selection Board should agree and note the maximum number of candidates to be called for interview. (A minimum no. of 3 candidates is recommended as best practice however if there is just one eligible candidate the interview must proceed although the decision to appoint is based solely on merit). Candidates should be selected for interview based on their short listing ranking/score.

iii. Review of Applications

- Applications must only be opened after the closing date for receipt of same and in the presence of all selection board members.
- Only applications that meet the minimum eligibility criteria for the appointment of special needs assistant should be considered.
- All eligible applicants should be ranked in accordance with the agreed short listing criteria.
- The reasons for the non-selection of a candidate for interview should be noted and retained.

iv. Scheduling Interviews

- Once the selection board has completed the short listing process agreement on the interview schedule should be reached within the following parameters:
  - ◊ Candidates should be given **a minimum 5 days notice** of the interview date
  - ◊ The venue must provide an appropriate environment for holding the interviews and should also have a suitable private waiting area.

v. Invitation to Interview / Unsuccessful Application Letters

- Once the selection board has satisfied itself that the shortlist process has been adhered to it may prepare and post letters of regret to unsuccessful applicants (see Appendix 4 for a sample regret letter).

- The letter of invitation (see Appendix 5) to interview should provide the following information:
  - ◊ The date and time of interview.
  - ◊ The approximate duration of the interview.
  - ◊ Directions to the interview venue.
  - ◊ Who to report to on arrival at the venue.
  - ◊ Information on the school.
  - ◊ A copy of the Schedule for Catholic Schools (please see appendix 6).
  - ◊ Contact name and details for any queries that may arise prior to the interview.

Applications received after the closing date and time **may not be considered** for interview.

3. Documentation for Interview:

All members of the selection board should be provided with copies of the following documents prior to the interviews:

- Advertisement.
- Curriculum Vitae (and any other documentation requested).
- Criteria for post.
- Agreed interview questions and marking scheme.
- Interview timetable.

Step 4: Conducting the Interview

1. Interview Structure:

An effective interview structure will have 5 distinct areas:

a) **Introduction/Opening** - welcome, introduction of selection board members, relax the candidate, provide information about the school and the post, explain the structure of the interview.

b) **Candidate Assessment**

c) **Candidate questions** - give the candidate the initiative and opportunity to add anything they think relevant.

d) **Close the interview** - indicate when they will hear your decision, thank them for attending.

e) **Evaluation** - each member of the selection board should evaluate the candidates performance immediately after the interview. The evaluation should be completed without reference to the other selection board members and in-line with the pre-agreed marking scheme.

2. Role of the Chairperson:

a) Welcome the candidate, introduce the members of the selection board to the candidate and explain who they are.

b) Monitor the interview re. time and consistency and fairness of questioning. Add supplementary questions for any point requiring clarification after the Selection Board members have finished.

c) At the end of the interview ask the candidate if, there are any points which he/she would like to add in support of their application, any additional information to add in respect of any of the questions asked and if he/she has any question for the selection board.

d) Seek and note the candidates consent to contact their listed referees.

e) Thank the candidate for attending and conclude the interview.

f) Ensure that notes are kept. In particular that there is a written record of the questions asked.

3. Assessing the Candidates

- The candidates must be asked the same set of questions.
- The marking sheet should be supported by notes. The notes normally include references to responses to questions, evidence given in terms of each criterion, overall assessment of candidate's suitability for appointment.

- After each interview each member should have a well constructed summary.

4. Final Deliberations

On the conclusion of the interviews the chairperson of the selection board may initiate a discussion on the candidates.

- The chairperson must then record the aggregate score achieved by each candidate.
- Candidates should be listed in order of merit.
- A list of candidates **deemed suitable** in order of merit should be compiled by the selection board in the event of the post not being filled by the no. 1 listed candidate or in the event that a further post may arise in the school over the course of the school year.
- In the event that no candidate is deemed suitable to fill the post the reasons for this decision should be noted.

5. Checking References

It is obligatory to reference check (see Appendix 7 - Reference Checking Template) the successful candidate. It is advisable to conduct the reference check (with the exception of the candidates current employer) prior to submitting the written report to the BoM, allowing the board to make a fully informed decision when ratifying an appointment. The reference check :

- Should pose a set of questions based on the job specification.
- Seek clarification of level, dept, and range of experience and skills demonstrated.
- May be conducted over the telephone—a reference checking form should be used in this instance.

- The selection board should compile a written report to the Board of Management nominating the most suitable candidate and providing a list of suitable candidates in order of merit (subject to reference check).

Interview Do Not's

- Do not ask discriminatory questions (Discrimination is forbidden on 9 grounds—age, sexual orientation, race, religion, disability, membership of the traveller community, family status, marital status, gender). Examples of discriminatory questions are as follows:
    - *Have you any plans to get married?*
    - *Do you intend having children soon?*
    - *How do you balance your family and work responsibilities?*
    - *Does your weight limit you in carrying out certain tasks?*
    - *How do you keep up your enthusiasm for teaching at this time of your life?*

- Do not deviate from the pre-agreed interview structure, format or questions.

Step 5: Making an Appointment

1. The Role of the Board of Management

a) Upon receipt of the selection boards report the Board of Management will review the report and make an appointment (if appropriate).

b) Prior to notifying the successful candidate the BoM will, in writing, seek the Patrons' approval of the appointment.

c) On receipt of the Patrons approval the BoM will notify the successful candidate in writing. It should be noted that **the offer of employment is subject to**

- Receipt of a certificate of medical fitness that s/he is fit to undertake the duties of the post (the medical practitioner providing such a cert to be nominated by the Board of Management, and the cost incurred to be borne by the successful candidate).
- Satisfactory Garda Vetting.

d) The unsuccessful candidates will only be notified once written acceptance has been received from the successful candidate.

2. Documentation to be Completed

The chairperson and successful candidate should complete the following documentation:

- Appointment and Re-Appointment Form - Special Needs Assistant, available for download at www.stsenansed.ie, to be returned to NTS Payroll, Payroll Division, Dept. of Education & Science, Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath.
- SNA Contract of Employment (available for download at www.stsenansed.ie)
- Garda vetting form, available for download at www.stsenansed.ie, to be returned to the local Diocese (please seen Garda Vetting information page on www.stsenansed.ie for the local address to which the form should be returned).

Determining Seniority

If two or more Special Needs Assistants commence duty on the same day, the Board of Management should establish the order of seniority based on the order that the Special Needs Assistants were listed as a result of the interview process.

On completion of the interview process the following documentation should be retained by the BoM for a minimum of one calendar year:

- Advertisement
- Patrons Approval of Selection Board
- Established criteria for post
- Short listing criteria
- Assessment questions
- Individual and aggregate marking sheets for each candidate
- Reports, notes and decision of the selection board
- Copy of letter to and from Patron re. appointment approval

Documentation to be retained for the duration of the successful applicant's employment.

- Advertisement
- Short listing score, interview questions and individual and aggregate marking sheets from interview
- Letter of offer to the candidate
- Letter of acceptance from the candidate
- Copy of Appointment and Re-Appointment Form - Special Needs Assistant
- Certificate of medical fitness
- Garda Vetting Report.
- Contract of Employment.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Special Needs Assistant Sample Job Description & Person Specification

Appendix 2: Sample Interview Questions: Special Needs Assistant

Appendix 3: Special Needs Assistant Short Listing Criteria

Appendix 4: Sample Regret Letter

Appendix 5: Sample Invitation to Interview Letter

Appendix 6: Schedule for Catholic Schools

Appendix 7: Reference Checking Template

(Soft copies of all of the above are available for download at www.stsenansed.ie)

SCHOOL NAME
Job Description & Person Specification

Job Title: Special Needs Assistant

Responsible To: The Board of Management

Job Purpose: Under the direction of the Principal to provide care and assistance to a pupil that has a special need(s). Such a need existing where, for example, a pupil has a significant medical need, a significant impairment of physical or sensory function or where their behaviour is such that they are a danger to themselves or to other pupils. Pupils' needs could range from needing an assistant for a short period each week, for example to help feed or change the pupil(s) or bring them to the toilet, to requiring a full-time assistant.

Duties & Responsibilities

The duties of the Special Needs Assistant are assigned by the Principal Teacher and sanctioned by the Board of Management. Those duties involve tasks of a non-teaching nature and include but are not limited to the following

- Preparation and tidying up of classroom(s) in which the pupil(s) with special needs is/are being taught.
- Assisting children to board and alight from school buses. Where necessary travel as escort on school buses may be required.
- Special assistance as necessary for pupils with particular difficulties e.g. helping physically disabled pupils with typing or writing.
- Assistance with clothing, feeding, toileting and general hygiene.
- Assisting on out-of-school visits, walks and similar activities.
- Assisting the teachers in the supervision of pupils with special needs during assembly, recreational and dispersal periods.
- Accompanying individuals or small groups who may have to be withdrawn temporarily from the classroom.
- General assistance to the class teachers, under the direction of the Principal, with ***duties of a non-teaching nature.*** *(Special Needs Assistants may not act either as substitute or temporary teachers. In no circumstances may they be left in sole charge of a class).*

Special Needs Assistant Person Specification			
Criteria	***Essential***	***Desirable***	***Advantageous***
Qualifications	• *Grade D (pass) in Irish, English & Maths in the Intermediate/Junior Certificate or the Day Vocational Certificate Examination (or equivalent exam)*	• *Cert/Diploma in SEN / Childcare (e.g. FETAC in SEN)* • *Certificate in First Aid*	• *Third level qualification in SEN / Childcare*
Knowledge and Experience	• Experience of working with children • Demonstrable awareness of the challenges facing SEN pupils	• Experience in an educational setting • Demonstrable knowledge of child protection guidelines as they pertain to the role. • Knowledge of the school's Code of Behaviour and how this policy pertains to the role of SNA	• Experience of working with SEN children
Skills & Aptitudes	• A good team worker • Ability to ask for support • Good interpersonal skills • Ability to maintain confidentiality	• Demonstrable sensitivity to pupil's individual needs. • Demonstrable ability and willingness to undertake training for new skills	• Demonstrable ability to diffuse and divert challenging behaviour
Ethos	• Demonstrable commitment to become actively involved in supporting the Catholic ethos of the school.		

Notes to Job Description & Person Specification:

- This is a sample job description and person specification.
- The term demonstrable is used in the following context:- '*Demonstrable*' the candidate can articulate the relevant knowledge, skill, expertise or aptitude to deal with a situation or answer the question posed. The candidate does not necessarily have direct experience of the area on which the question is based.

Sample Interview Questions - SNA

1. Why are you interested in applying for this position?
2. Briefly outline your educational qualifications and experience in relation to position of special needs assistant.
3. How would you define the role of special needs assistant?
4. What do you consider the three most important character traits of a special needs assistant are? Why are these characteristics important?
5. The pupils' you may be supporting have varying needs from Autistic Spectrum Disorders to physical disabilities. Please explain any experience or training you have working with children with disabilities.
6. How would you deal with a difficult child?
7. Do you agree that as a special needs assistant you have total responsibility for the discipline of a child/children in your care?
8. How would you define the role of special needs assistant in relation to that of classroom teacher?
9. What are the challenges faced by an SEN pupil in an educational setting?
10. How would you deal with a child that has not been fully toilet trained?
11. If you witnessed an event involving a member of the teaching staff behaving in a manner that caused you concern what would you do?
12. If the child you were assisting was being teased or was the subject of name-calling how would you deal with this?
13. Do you think it is appropriate to discuss the child/children to whom you have been assigned with another member of staff? If you do in what circumstances is it appropriate? If you do not, why not?
14. If you felt you were being unfairly treated by another member of school staff what would you do?
15. If the parent of a child to whom you have been assigned approaches you with concerns over the manner in which the classroom was being managed what would you.
16. How would you contribute to the spiritual growth of the school and its Catholic identity?

Special Needs Assistant – Short Listing Criteria

ST. SENAN'S EDUCATION OFFICE
Dioceses of • Kerry • Killaloe • Limerick

1.) Minimum Requirements *(Applicants that fail to meet the minimum requirements may not be selected for interview)*	***Marks***
(1 Mark) • Grade D (pass) in Irish, English & Maths in the Intermediate/Junior Certificate or the Day Vocational Certificate Examination (or equivalent exam)	
2.) Essential Skills/Knowledge/Aptitude/Experience	
(1 Mark) • Experience of working with children	
3.) Desirable Skills/Knowledge/Aptitude/Experience	
(Marks awarded should be proportionate to length of service) • Experience in an educational setting	
(1 Mark for each relevant Cert, 2 marks for each relevant Diploma) • Cert/Diploma in SEN / Childcare (e.g. FETAC in SEN) • Certificate in First Aid	
4.) Advantageous Skills/Knowledge/Aptitude/Experience	
(Marks awarded should be proportionate to length of service) • Experience of working with SEN children	
(1 Mark for each relevant Diploma, 2 marks for each relevant Degree, 3 marks for a relevant Masters) • Third level qualification in SEN / Childcare	

ST. SENAN'S EDUCATION OFFICE
Dioceses of • Kerry • Killaloe • Limerick

Chairperson Name,
School Name,
Address,
Address.

Candidate Name,
Address,
Address.

DD/MM/YR

Dear Candidate Name,

I write to thank you for your application for the post of special needs assistant at School Name. The selection board has completed the short listing of applications and I regret that on this occasion you have not been successful.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you well in your future career.

Yours sincerely,

_____
Chairperson Name
Chairperson
Board of Management

ST. SENAN'S EDUCATION OFFICE
Dioceses of • Kerry • Killaloe • Limerick

Chairperson Name,
School Name,
Address,
Address.

Candidate Name,
Address,
Address.

DD/MM/YR

Dear Candidate Name,

I write to thank you for your application for the post of special needs assistant at (name of school). The selection board has completed the short listing of applications and I am pleased to inform you that you have been selected for interview.

Your interview is scheduled for *Time* on *Day*, the *Date* of *Month* at *Venue*.

I enclose a copy of the Schedule for Catholic Schools for your information.

Please confirm by return of post your intention to accept or decline this invitation to interview. Should you have any queries prior to interview please contact Name on tel.

I look forward to meeting with you.

Yours sincerely,

_____
Chairperson,
Board of Management

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Roman Catholic School
SCHEDULE

A Roman Catholic school (which is established in connection with the Minister) aims at promoting the full and harmonious development of all aspects of the person of the pupil: intellectual, physical, cultural, moral and spiritual, including a living relationship with God and with other people. The school models and promotes a philosophy of life inspired by belief in God and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Catholic school provides religious education for the pupils in accordance with the doctrines, practices and tradition of the Roman Catholic Church and promotes the formation of the pupils in the Catholic Faith.

Reference Checking Template

Candidate Name:		Position Applied For:	
Reference Check Conducted By:		Date:	
Referee Name		School/Organisation:	
School/Organisation Address			
Telephone:		Email:	

Can you please confirm the dates from which the candidate was employed by your school/organisation
Please describe your reporting relationship with the candidate? If none, in what capacity did you observe the candidate's work?
Why did the candidate leave?
Please describe the key responsibilities of the candidate in his/her most recent position with the school/organisation.
How many reporting staff did the candidate manage (if applicable)?
Did the candidate hold a post of responsibility, or did the candidate perform any function outside of his/her normal duties on a voluntary basis?

What would you describe as the candidate's most important contribution to the school/organisation?
Please describe the candidate's relationships with his/her co-workers.
What are the candidate's most significant strengths?
What are the candidate's most significant weaknesses?
What is your overall assessment of the candidate?
We have selected this candidate for the position of _____. Would you recommend him/her for this position?
Would you rehire this individual?
Are there any additional comments you would like to make?