

Meeting with DE, DoH & EA

Special School Summer Scheme Provision

Tuesday 17 February 2026

Attendees:

Clar McKenna (EA)

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Deirdre Ward (DE)

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Online:

Mark McGuicken (DoH) (Part meeting)

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Apologies:

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No.	Description	Action
1.	Welcome and Outline of Issues	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ██████████ welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the issue. ██████ noted that the context of the meeting was the Special School Summer Scheme Review 2023 and issues highlighted in the report as well as issues raised at the Special School Strategic Leadership Group (SSSLG) meeting in November 2025. ██████ noted the strength of feeling related to the issues raised at the SSSLG, particularly in terms of health & safety.• ██████ advised that feedback from the SSSPLG which has representatives from 10 Special Schools was that all 40 Special Schools felt the same about the health & safety risks.• ██████ highlighted the increase in Specialist Provisions in recent years due to there not being sufficient space in Special Schools and the need to involve these pupils in future provision.• ██████ also noted the Minister’s 10-year plan for new Special Schools to be built subject to funding and the associated plans of action.• Given that there are not currently enough placements for the increase in numbers of children with special	

	<p>needs, the increase in complexity of needs and the building work currently happening over the summer in some schools, it is a challenging situation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [REDACTED] advised that there were two aspects to be considered; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The immediate situation in 2026 ▪ The longer term post 2026 situation. • [REDACTED] reiterated that the primary risk was health & safety and this related to staffing, including the increased risk of bringing in outside staff to deliver summer schemes who were not familiar with the complex needs of the children, and managing the expectations of parents who felt that the provision during summer provision is the same as that during term time. • [REDACTED] emphasised that everyone recognised the benefits of summer provision for children attending special schools and that come through in the review of summer schemes but the main issue is ensuring the health and safety of all children at all times. 	
2.	Health & Safety- Staffing	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deirdre Ward (DW) outlined the issues with staffing including the complexity of the workforce, high ratios of staff required, the skills needed to deliver safe programmes, career progression of the staff involved, staff operating outside contractual arrangements and the confidence of staff in delivering. • The BUD Club was an example of a model working well but the current model of Special School Summer Schemes has not kept pace with the changes in level of complexity of need and the number of children being educated in special schools. • [REDACTED] advised that volunteers and substitute staff cannot currently meet the complexity of need presented by the children. 	
3.	Solutions to Mitigate Risks	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DW noted that the decision to pause Special School Summer Schemes in 2026 is not a cost decision but it is about ensuring at all times the health and safety of the children. • Clar McKenna (CMcK) highlighted the need for proper planning and time to do this. • The skills of the Community & Voluntary sector in this area were noted by DW. • DW advised that more investment will be needed for any new model. • [REDACTED] suggested that a better offer was needed for young people. • DW suggested that the solution should be developed cross departmentally with joint funding and joint 	

	<p>oversight and with input from other stakeholders such as local councils and voluntary and community sector.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • █████ asked if Special School facilities can be made available for outside organisations to deliver summer schemes. This was not ruled out. • █████ suggested that the Respite & Recreation Forum led by █████ may provide a vehicle to progress a new model. • █████ outlined the list provided by EA Youth Service on out of hours provisions and noted that not all are suitable for the complexity of need with this cohort of children. 	
4.	DoH- Input	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mark McGuicken (MMcG) asked if provision in Special School Summer Schemes could be provided in 2026 for half of the current cohort and noted his concern about the schemes being paused as it will be difficult to start up again. • DW noted that there may be challenges in equity if only half of the children can be offered a place. • █████ suggested if staffing support from Health Trusts would be worth looking into and asked what the gap is that needs to be filled. • █████ noted that collecting information is difficult. • █████ asked how many staff would be required. • DW advised that there was no granular breakdown but information from the feedback forms received from some schools is available. It was noted that not all schools had provided the feedback requested so any data provided would not offer a full picture of need. • █████ advised that she requires a breakdown of the number of staff per Trust area and the grade required. • █████ advised that the staff from outside of Special Schools will not know the children and that there will be governance issues for the Special Schools when managing staff from outside of the school. • █████ agreed to check and confirm if Health Trusts can provide the staffing required for 2026. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • █████/CMcK█████ to provide █████ with a breakdown of DE & EA numbers returned per Trust area and an estimate of staffing required. • █████ to check and confirm if Health Trust can provide the staffing required for 2026.
5	Closing	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DW thanked everyone for attending. 	