

DE/2026-049 – Freedom of Information Request

Request:

I request the following information relating to Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision in Northern Ireland.

1. Newcomer pupils in SEN settings

Please provide the total number of pupils classified as “newcomer pupils” currently enrolled in:

- Special schools
- SEN-specific units within mainstream schools

Please provide the most recent available figures and, if possible, a breakdown by school type.

2. Proportion of SEN pupils who are newcomers

Please provide:

- The total number of pupils in SEN settings (special schools and SEN units)
- The number and percentage of those pupils who are classified as newcomer pupils

3. SEN waiting lists

Please provide the current number of children waiting for:

- Placement in a special school
- Placement in an SEN unit within a mainstream school

4. Waiting list breakdown by newcomer status

For those on SEN waiting lists, please provide (if recorded):

- Number of children classified as newcomer pupils
- Number of children not classified as newcomer pupils

5. Policy and prioritisation

Please confirm:

- Whether newcomer status is recorded alongside SEN status in official datasets
- Whether this data is used in planning or allocating SEN provision
- Whether newcomer status is considered in prioritisation of SEN placements

6. Historical data (if available)

Please provide the above figures for each year from 2018 to the most recent available year.

Department Response:

I refer to your request under the above legislation for information relating to Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision in Northern Ireland. This request, received on the 23 March, was for:

1. *The total number of pupils classified as “newcomer pupils” currently enrolled in:*

- *Special schools, and*
- *SEN-specific units within mainstream schools,*

Please provide the most recent available figures and if

possible a breakdown by school type

2. *The proportion of SEN pupils who are newcomers, including:*

- *The total number of pupils currently enrolled in special schools and SEN units*
- *The number and percentage of those pupils who are classified as newcomer pupils*

I can confirm that the Department holds the information you have requested in points 1 and 2. Please see the table below which shows the number and proportion of newcomer pupils since 2018 in Special Educational Provision.

Academic Year	Newcomer			% Newcomer			Total		
	Primary and Prep (N-Y7) Specialist Provision	Post-primary Specialist Provision	Special School	Primary and Prep (N-Y7) Specialist Provision	Post-primary Specialist Provision	Special School	Primary and Prep (N-Y7) Specialist Provision	Post-primary Specialist Provision	Special School
2018/19	62	13	177	5.2	1.7	3.0	1181	777	5959
2019/20	65	15	196	5.3	1.9	3.2	1230	810	6174
2020/21	86	22	193	6.5	2.6	3.0	1318	855	6403
2021/22	112	23	197	7.2	2.0	3.0	1558	1147	6653
2022/23	143	31	205	7.6	2.4	3.0	1874	1300	6930
2024/25	266	33	209	9.5	1.9	2.8	2787	1751	7462
2025/26	329	40	215	10.0	2.0	2.8	3301	1955	7729

Source: NI school census

Notes:

Data is based on pupils enrolled on Census day i.e. The Friday of the first full week in October (In 2025/26 this was the 10 October 2025)

A newcomer pupil is one who has enrolled in a school but who does not have the satisfactory language skills to participate fully in the school curriculum, and the wider environment, and does not have a language in common with the teacher, whether that is English or Irish. This has previously been referred to as English an Additional Language. It does not refer to indigenous pupils who choose to attend an Irish medium school.

3. *SEN waiting lists, including the current number of children waiting for:*

- *Placement in a special school*
- *Placement in a SEN unit within a mainstream school*

Responsibility for provision of SEN placements lies with the Education Authority (EA), and therefore the Department does not hold this information.

4. *SEN waiting list breakdown by newcomer status, including:*

- *Number of children classified as newcomer pupils*
- *Number of children not classified as newcomer pupils*

Please see response to point 3 above.

5. *Policy and prioritisation, including:*

- *Whether newcomer status is recorded alongside SEN status in official datasets*

Newcomer status and SEN status are collected by the Department through annual data collections such as the school census and school leavers survey. Within these datasets, both variables are recorded and can be linked at individual pupil level for statistical purposes.

- *Whether this data is used in planning or allocating SEN provision*
- *Whether newcomer status is considered in prioritisation of SEN placements*

Please see response to point 3 above.

6. *Historical data relating to points 1-5, from 2018 to the most recent available year*

Please see responses above.