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Dear Parent

### **Special Schools Summer Schemes 2026**

I'm writing to you in relation to special schools' summer schemes for 2026.

Firstly, we would like to recognise that many of our special schools ran summer schemes in 2025 for our children and young people with the most complex special needs. It is clear how valued these schemes are by those who attend, and their families.

The evaluations received indicate the many positive benefits for our children and young people with complex SEN including social interaction and inclusion with peers, building confidence and friendships outside the formal classroom setting, taking part in enriching, memorable experiences and boosting self-esteem. I want to thank all our special schools for enabling children and young people with SEN to benefit in this way.

At the heart of what we do is the safety and wellbeing of the children and young people. As you know we have ongoing issues around healthcare in special schools, with urgent work required to ensure comprehensive nurse-led special school health provision. Due to the increasing complexity of health needs in special schools, and the reduction in healthcare provisions in schools, delivering a safe environment for our children and young people is a daily challenge, which is only overcome thanks to the hard work and dedication from you and the wider school team.

Unfortunately, and despite the personal involvement of both the DE Permanent Secretary and the EA Chief Executive, discussions with colleagues in Health have not yet led to solutions being identified, neither for the immediate future or longer term. We have ongoing challenges around healthcare interventions for children and young people in schools, and challenges around healthcare training and delegation. Due to these ongoing challenges, we have made clear that on-site nursing cover at the summer schemes would be required to enable them to be safely held this year. The Department of Health confirmed in writing on Tuesday that this would not be available.

Taking into account all available information, and prioritising the safety of our children and young people, EA has reluctantly concluded that it would not be possible to run summer schemes safely in special schools in 2026. Consequently, if the schemes cannot be safe, we cannot proceed with them.

In addition, the challenges around healthcare interventions are compounded by other risks associated with the schemes, including safe staffing, maintaining an acceptable staff to pupil ratio,

leadership and purpose of the schemes and governance structures. If and when the healthcare challenges in special schools have been solved, solutions for these risks can be found and are something we will work together on. The issues are not new and are not the cause of the decision on this year's summer schemes. If adequate health service cover had been confirmed on a timely basis, the schemes would be going ahead.

I would like to emphasise that this is a decision based on the safety and welfare of the children in our care, and not a decision based on funding. Without solutions to healthcare in special schools, it is not possible to safely run schemes.

Outcomes for children and young people is at the core of what EA does. We want to achieve long-term sustainable change so that children with complex SEN and disabilities have regular access to creative play, leisure and recreation activities outside of school hours and in their local communities.

My team and I will continue to seek to find solutions to healthcare in special schools. The Department of Health has agreed that there is overlap between special school summer schemes and HSC respite services for children and young people with special needs. There is an onus on us all to work intensively together on a way forward.

If solutions can be found relatively quickly, it should be possible to work for special schools' summer schemes in 2027 and onwards. We look forward to working with schools on that, and wider issues going forward.

I want to re-emphasise that this has been a particularly challenging decision to reach, however, the health and safety of our children and young people must always remain paramount.

I appreciate that this decision is not what anyone wants and will come as a disappointment.

I would appreciate if this letter can be circulated to parents and carers.

For our parents and carers, and staff, I want to note that this is a decision taken by the EA, and not by principals or schools. The EA has therefore set up a phone line and email address where questions can be directed and we have created a designated landing page on our website.

**EA website:** <https://www.eani.org.uk/parents/other-help-for-parents/special-schools-summer-schemes>

**Email address:** [cyps.correspondence@eani.org.uk](mailto:cyps.correspondence@eani.org.uk)

**Phone number:** 028 9047 5047

Yours sincerely



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