

ICT and Special Educational Needs



This advice sheet contains basic advice for teachers getting involved in the purchase of ICT for special needs. Some comprehensive sources of ICT and Special Educational Needs (SEN) advice have already been developed by the NCTE, and this sheet draws attention to specific sections of these information sources whose links can be accessed at the bottom of this sheet. These are:

- The Special Needs page in the teachers section of the Scoilnet website. Scoilnet is the NCTE developed 'Portal for Irish Education' and this section contains information, advice and services provided by many organizations and institutions involved in supporting teachers involved in SEN.
- The Special Needs & ICT section of the NCTE website. This section contains information about the SEN and ICT initiatives as well as advice and resources for teachers and others working in the area of ICT and SEN.
- A booklet entitled *Information and Advice: Special Educational Needs and Information and Communications Technology*. This booklet, produced by the NCTE in 2000, is also available in electronic form via the URLs listed at the end of this sheet.

What ICT is Suitable for SEN?

- When planning how to spend ICT funds on SEN, decisions need to be made regarding how much to spend on infrastructure (networking and internet access), hardware (desktop computers, laptops, other portable devices), common hardware peripherals (scanners, printers, digital cameras), additional peripherals for SEN (rollerballs, touchscreens, etc.), and software, both mainstream and specialised. Note that most of the ICT equipment used in special needs education is also used in mainstream education — special equipment and software programs are not always essential.
- In order to satisfy the individual needs of pupils, teachers should consult as many sources as possible for guidance before making up their own minds about the best technology solution for their pupils.

Possible Educational Advantages

ICT can support students with special needs when used in a purposeful and meaningful way. See 'Resources and Advice' in the Special Needs & ICT section of this website for details of hardware and software, how to use ICT and case studies describing ICT in specific situations.

Purchasing Considerations

- Consider as far as possible any special applications or software programs that may be used before buying a computer because certain software programs may need specific types of hardware in order to run effectively.
- A computer with a number of USB ports is necessary for connecting different peripherals.
- Some of the more specialised special education software can be quite demanding of the computer's memory, so it is advisable to use a laptop or PC with at least 1GB of memory and a disk drive of at least 60GB.
- Having bought a computer, the next step will be to build up information on special software and additions to, or modifications of, the basic computer. For this, a broad awareness of the

types of software and computer additions (peripherals) is needed. This awareness can be gained in a number of ways:

- Use the 'Resources and Advice' pages in the Special Needs & ICT section of the NCTE website to access basic information and points of contact. This section also provides information on different types of software and tips on how to identify good quality SEN software.
 - Contact suppliers and/or publishers for their catalogues of software and computer peripherals (e.g., rollerballs, touchscreens, special keyboards).
 - Check out the Web, including the ScoilNet website and in particular the Software Central section of ScoilNet for teacher evaluations of software products.
 - Contact other teachers before making any decision, as they may have faced similar questions and be able to give some good advice and practical information. There may be a local teacher support group in the area, for instance (organised via the ICT Advisor in the regional education centres). Another option is to contribute to online discussion groups, talk to schools involved in innovative ICT projects (e.g., The NCTE's 'Laptops Initiative' whose accompanying CD and booklet entitled *Engaging Learners* is available from the NCTE), and to the staff of special schools who may be able to offer advice and support.
- Remember that some relevant software is available for downloading free of charge from the Internet.
 - When purchasing products, be sure to look for a beneficial sales agreement. Many suppliers/publishers are aware that finding the right software and peripherals for students with special needs can be a 'trial and error' process, and are prepared to offer a trial period where the software can be returned and/or another product can be purchased if the original selection does not meet the necessary requirements.

Sources of Advice and Information

- NCTE's SEN staff may be able to help, or refer you to someone who can.
- The SEN and ICT advice service of the Department of Education and Science, provided by Ann Jackson, e-mail ajackson@crc.ie.
- The Client Technical Services Department (CTS) department based in the Central Remedial Clinic in Dublin phone (01) 8542360 or visit http://www.crc.ie/services_cli.shtml
- The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) website, which aims is to provide a wide range of helpful information about educational provision for children with special educational needs.
- The Special Education Support Service (SESS) website provides information and support. It also has links for accessing information on a range of topics relating to special education, both in Ireland and internationally.
- The school inspector or local psychologist, who may be able to offer advice or referral, or identify some teachers who would be willing to share their experiences with other teachers.
- Non-profit service providers, who may offer an advisory service and/or assessment services in special needs technology, often related to a specific disability.
- There may be some private service providers offering a professional service in technology needs assessment, choice and application in the area. These include educational psychologists in private practice.

Specifications/what is needed

Refer to the other advice sheets for information on hardware, PCs etc. Regarding software, refer to the Educational Software advice sheet, the Special Needs & ICT section of the NCTE website or ScoilNet's special needs section.

Relevant Web Sites

NCTE Website

www.ncte.ie/SpecialNeedsICT

This section contains information and advice for teachers who are interested in the use of technology with students with special educational needs. The information provided was developed by a number of Irish teachers and organisations who are currently working in this field.

Scoilnet website

www.scoilnet.ie/T_Sen.aspx

Scoilnet is the NCTE developed 'Portal for Irish Education', this section of the website focuses on links to advice and information relating to the use of ICT in SEN as well as to organizations and institutions involved in Special Education.

Special Education Support Service

www.sess.ie/sess/Main/Home.htm

The purpose of this website is two-fold:

1. To inform users as to the role of the Special Education Support Service and the types of support we provide.
2. To act as a portal for accessing information on a range of topics relating to special education, both in Ireland and internationally.

National Council for Special Education

www.ncse.ie

The aim of this website is to provide some introductory information about the work of the Council and to provide a wide range of helpful information about educational provision for children with special educational needs.

Note: While the advice sheets aim to act as a guide, the inclusion of any products and company names does not imply approval by the NCTE, nor does the exclusion imply the reverse. The NCTE does not accept responsibility for any opinions, advice or recommendations on external web sites linked to the NCTE site.

This Advice Sheet and other relevant information are available at:

www.ncte.ie/ICTAdviceSupport/AdviceSheets/