



EIGHTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

17 March 2026

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS AUTHORITY – PRIMARY SCHOOLS – AUTISTS – ADMISSION DELAY

(No. B/39) Ms A. Savabaddy (First Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resource whether, in regard to the Special Needs Education Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the number of primary schools falling under the purview thereof, indicating the reasons for the delay in respect of some children with autism not starting the school year 2026 on time and whether the issues have now been resolved.

Dr. Gungapersad: Madam Speaker, at the outset, let me thank the hon. Member for this question which is her third one related to autistic children after those she asked on 18 March and 17 June 2025.

Madam Speaker, allow me to apprise the House that in accordance to section 5 of the Special Education Needs Authority Act, the main functions of the SENA are inter-alia to –

- (a) register special education needs institutions, their teaching and non-teaching staff and any other resource person, and
- (b) take appropriate action to ensure that special education needs institutions are managed in accordance with relevant laws, rules, guidelines, directives and standards.

Madam Speaker, the Special Education Needs institutions falling under the purview of SENA are as follows –

- 12 SEN integrated units which are classrooms in public primary schools dedicated to SEN learners;
- 7 SEN resource development centres which cater for children with severe disabilities;
- 47 NGOs providing services to SEN learners, and

- 8 RCA SEN schools.

I would like to add that admission of SEN learners is not limited only to SEN institutions. In certain cases, SEN learners are also enrolled in mainstream primary schools which do not fall under the purview of SENA.

Madam Speaker, I am informed by SENA that a communiqué was issued on 09 May 2025, inviting applications for admission of SEN learners in Grade 1 for the year 2026. Each application had to be supported inter-alia by a medical certificate.

521 applications were received as from that date of issue of the communiqué until February 2026. Out of these applications, 438 children turned up for screening exercises by allied health professionals in the SEN resource development centres. The mandatory comprehensive screening is carried out to determine the educational placement and accommodation required. Out of the 438 children who were screened, 143 children were identified to suffer from mild autism spectrum disorder. 32 of them were admitted in mainstream public and aided-primary schools as at 13 February 2026.

Madam Speaker, I am informed that there have been delays in the admission of these 32 children because of lack of teacher assistants and carers. With a view to coping with the situation, arrangements had been made by my Ministry for the reallocation of teacher assistants and carers in certain cases. In other cases, internal arrangements were made by school management to accommodate the children with the assistance of teachers and support teachers in certain schools.

As regards the remaining children who suffer from higher forms of autism, they have been admitted in NGO SEN schools, SEN resource development centres and SEN integrated units. Madam Speaker, I am also informed that there is currently an acute shortage of teacher assistants and carer on the local market.

My Ministry is envisaging the following measures on the short and medium terms in order to palliate for the shortage –

- (1) Review the existing norms and standards to ease recruitment of assistant teachers, carers, and medical specialists in some cases;
- (2) Contacting parents of children with disabilities who are willing to accompany their wards in the mainstream school on a voluntary and short-term basis;
- (3) Creation of post of teacher assistants and carers on the establishment of my Ministry in the forthcoming budget;
- (4) Accelerated training courses by the MIE to new recruits, and
- (5) Working in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Wellness to have the support of medical professionals.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Yes, Ms Savabaddy.

Ms Savabaddy: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Pourquoi ce sont les enfants autistes qui doivent faire les frais des carences administratives alors qu'on doit leur donner le meilleur encadrement possible pour étudier ?

Le ministre vient tout juste de faire mention à ma question parlementaire datant du 17 juin 2025 – alors vous avez fait mention d’unité intégrée, renforcée pour les enfants autistes.

Où en sommes-nous ?

Dr. Gungapersad: Madam Speaker, as I said, one of the major problems that we are facing is about staffing in that sector. Unfortunately, the number of our kids who need special education needs is increasing and on the other side, we do not have trained professionals to cater for that sector. We are short of that; we are conscious. That is why I gave the five measures which are palliative in order to address that issue in the short and medium term.

Madam Speaker: Yes, Mr Beehook and then Mr Juman.

Mr Beehook: Madam Speaker, this is the paradox. On one hand, we are saying we don’t have staff and on the other hand, I am aware of lots of cases where people who have been hired to work in SEN schools, are still awaiting registration. May I request the hon. Minister to look into all those pending cases of registration which might perhaps fill in those posts that are required to run these special schools for our special kids?

Madam Speaker: Are you aware, hon. Minister?

Dr. Gungapersad: Yes, Madam Speaker, let me inform the hon. Member that there was a communiqué whereby we wanted to recruit and many of those persons – perhaps the hon. Member may give me the list later on – they do not have the official and administrative requirements in order to be recruited.

At times, we even ask parents of these children to come and help as carers.

Madam Speaker: Yes, Mr Juman.

Mr Juman: Madam Speaker, in the same vein, with regard to teachers, carers and assistant teachers, can the hon. Minister inform the House the number of pending applications at the level of SENA?

Madam Speaker: Is it not the same question?

Mr Juman: Yes, the same question.

Madam Speaker: It is the same question?

Mr Juman: Yes, but the number of applications pending.

Madam Speaker: So, you want to know the number?

Mr Juman: Yes.

Madam Speaker: It looks like it is a serious topic.

Dr. Gungapersad: It is indeed, Madam Speaker. It is indeed a serious issue and I have taken good note. I thank him and hon. Ms Savabaddy for their personal involvement in caring for those autistic children. I will ask SENA to do the needful.

Madam Speaker: Okay, we are done more or less. Hon. Ms Savabaddy, you are happy?

Ms Savabaddy: Yes.

