



## **Special Educational Needs Policy**

### **Introduction**

The BOM is committed to a whole school approach to inclusive education, by complying with legislation and by implementing good practice. It strives to ensure that: there is equality of access to the school; all pupils have a sense of belonging to the school community; can learn and grow at their own pace; are allowed to reach their potential; will gain self-knowledge, self-respect and feelings of positive empowerment; and are able to value individuality, empathise with others and make friends. The BOM supports its staff to take an innovative and collaborative approach to addressing individual children's educational, social and emotional needs. This involves the sharing of information about children, the sharing of responsibilities, the sharing of professional knowledge, CPD, and fostering a positive attitude towards inclusive education. The active participation of parents and guardians plays a crucial role in ensuring the best outcomes for children with special educational needs.

### **Rationale**

The rationale for this policy is to ensure compliance with the Education Act (1998) the Education Welfare Act (2000), The Equal Status Act (2000), Disability Bill (2002), and the E.P.S.E.N. Act (2004) and to implement good practice.

As a guiding principle we want all children particularly those with disabilities to feel that they are a valued part of the School Community. We do this through inclusion which has at its core, the following principles

- Setting suitable learning challenges.
- Responding to children's diverse learning needs.
- Overcoming barriers to learning and assessment

It is important that this document is read in conjunction with the following other school policies and procedures: behaviour, child protection, enrolment, data protection and health and safety,

### **Aims and objectives**

- To ensure all children gain access to a broad and balanced curriculum and have opportunity of access to an appropriate education
- To set out the whole school approach to teaching and learning re pupils with Special Needs (including EAL)
- To develop a partnership with parents/ carers
- To use all resources efficiently and equitably so that these children develop as learners, engage meaningfully with the curriculum and develop the skills and competencies necessary to lead an independent life

- To enable all pupils with disabilities in the school to share with their peers as complete an educational experience as possible.

### **Compliance with school ethos**

- Wicklow Educate Together N.S. strives to create learning opportunities for all children and that commitment underpins all school planning and policy documents. We particularly strive to cater for the most challenged children as their presence in the school enriches the entire school community.

### **Roles and responsibilities**

#### **1.1 BOM**

The BOM is responsible for ensuring that this policy is in place and up-to-date, and that adequate resources are allocated towards special educational needs provision. It does so within the constraints of Department of Education and Skills (DES) policy and resource allocation.

#### **1.2 Principal and Deputy Principal**

The Principal is responsible for ensuring that these procedures are implemented and monitored on an ongoing basis. Specifically, his/her role includes: overseeing a whole school assessment programme to identify pupils with additional support needs; liaising between external assessment agencies, teachers and parents/guardians; providing teachers with guidance on relevant teaching methods, materials and career development opportunities; providing line management to Special Needs Assistants (SNAs); and assisting pupils with special educational needs in their transition to second level education. Their duties are assumed by the Deputy Principal in his/her absence.

#### **1.3 Class teachers**

Class teachers have primary responsibility for the progress of all pupils in their classes, including pupils with special educational needs and EAL. They endeavour to alleviate learning difficulties using a wide range of appropriate teaching strategies. They maintain contact with parents/guardians during identification, screening, referral and supplementary teaching processes. They collaborate with support teachers in the development of appropriate group and individual plans. They adhere to the advice of any support services allocated to pupils and, where appropriate, liaise with support teachers to ensure ongoing support is provided to pupils whose supplementary teaching has recently been reduced or discontinued. They are also responsible for assigning appropriate class-related tasks to SNAs, under the overall supervision of the Principal, writing observation and keeping the relevant records.

#### **1.4 Resource and learning support teachers**

A team of resource and learning support teachers implements a broad range of strategies that endeavour to alleviate learning difficulties, enhance early learning and select pupils for supplementary teaching. In so doing, they consult and collaborate with the Principal, class teachers, SNAs, parent/guardians and a range of external professionals. As appropriate, they carry out diagnostic tests; draw up and implement individual/group profiles, plans and programmes; provide supplementary teaching; maintain weekly planning and progress records for pupils receiving

support; and monitor change over time. They also provide advice, when required, to class teachers and SNAs. They may engage in team teaching and in-class support. The support teachers are encouraged to upskill on a continual basis in the evolving field of special educational needs provision and in EAL teaching.

#### Learning Support:

A learning support teacher provides support to those children whose achievement is at a very low level and who are at risk of not reaching adequate levels of proficiency in Literacy and Numeracy. These children are usually identified by the class teacher and on standardised tests. Learning Support teachers sometimes work in the classroom with a small group of pupils who need extra support or withdraw children for intensive reading and maths sessions.

#### Resource:

A resource teacher provides support to children who have had a psychological assessment and who have a diagnosis. Resource teachers work with children with Autism, ADHD, Dyspraxia, Emotional and Behavioural issues and Speech and language difficulties. Usually a resource teacher works with the child alone outside the classroom. Sometimes the child will work with other children for social skills or movement group. Resource teachers help children to develop social skills, appropriate behaviour and manage their emotions as well as literacy and numeracy.

### 1.5 SNAs

SNAs are recruited to assist schools in providing a range of non-teaching supports to pupils with assessed special educational needs. SNAs numbers are allocated by the Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO). Within that allocation, the Principal coordinates access to the SNAs and deploys them to cover these children's needs as efficiently and effectively as possible. One SNA may support more than one child and, on occasion, children who are not based in the same classroom. SNAs are accountable to the Principal, although their day-to-day work may be supervised by a teacher, as determined by the Principal. An SNA may be employed to work with a particular pupil, but it is our policy, in the best interests of the pupil, to rotate support staff each year. The needs of the SNA have to be balanced with the needs of the pupil and the needs and resources of the school bearing in mind that the pupil should not develop dependence on the SNA. SNAs roles can be enhanced by working with different classes and year groups. The movement of SNA's between allocated pupils reduces over dependence and fosters flexibility. Circular [0021/2011](#) deals with the Educational Qualifications for Appointment as Special Needs Assistant in Recognised Primary Schools. [Circular 0030/2014](#) clarifies and restates the purpose of the SNA scheme.

### 1.6 Parents and guardians

Parents and guardians are encouraged to develop their children's early and ongoing oral language, reading, mathematical, social and life skills. They are provided with guidance on how to optimise learning for their children and cultivate a positive attitude towards education. They are asked to ensure homework is completed, to implement additionally suggested home-based activities, and to attend parent/teacher meetings.

Parents and guardians are encouraged to share with the school any relevant information about their child's strengths and needs, and are urged to contact the school if they have any concerns or suggestions in this regard.

If there is sufficient demand, the school will facilitate the establishment of a support group for parents and guardians who have children with special educational needs.

### **1.7 External agencies**

The school engages where necessary with external agencies on matters relating to the special educational needs of children in its care, such as therapists, the National Educational Psychological Service, and especially the local SENO. The SENO is appointed by the National Council for Special Education and plays a key role in allocating support teachers and SNAs to the school. The school may, from time to time, also engage with specialist and support organisations for specific conditions.

### **Guidelines**

#### **1. Individual and Support Educational Plans**

An IEP or support plan is formulated by breaking down the existing levels of attainment of the SEN child into finely graded targets. This is a collaborative process between Class Teachers, Support Teachers, SENO, parents, guardians and outside agencies.

The plan includes:

- The nature and degree of the child's abilities and skills
- The degree and nature of the child's special needs
- The child's present level of performance
- The services to be provided
- Targets and goals for a 5 month period

The school has its own particular IEP and support plan template. The management of IEP is the responsibility of Class Teachers and Support Teachers. A copy is sent to both parents/ guardians who can make recommendations. A review is conducted at the end of 3 months.

#### **2. Inclusion**

The goal of inclusion is to enable all pupils to belong within an educational community that values their individuality. This school attempts to promote inclusion through:

- Modifying activities
- Allowing all children the opportunity participate in oral work
- Allowing all children the opportunity to participate in group work
- Providing appropriate tasks and practical work
- Establishing a "Buddy System".

#### **3. Classroom Practices**

In this school teachers are encouraged to:

- Review previous work
- Present clearly new skills and concepts
- Guide student practice through provision of feedback
- Provide modified instruction
- Use age and ability appropriate written and oral work
- Adjust questioning to different ability levels
- Present materials at the appropriate level of difficulty
- Use a whole class visual timetable

#### **4. Alleviation of learning difficulties**

The school strives to promote inclusion at all times and to alleviate learning difficulties using a range of strategies. These include: encouraging participation of all pupils in all school activities inside and outside of the classroom; providing a stimulating and supportive learning environment for all; implementing agreed approaches to teaching to ensure progress and continuity from class to class; structured observation and assessment of literacy, numeracy and social/emotional skills in infant classes to facilitate early identification of possible learning difficulties and support needs; and active parental involvement.

#### **5. Early intervention**

When difficulties arise in the early years, different intervention strategies are employed for those children who need it. These mostly involve intensive small group teaching, although from time to time, use is made of one-to-one teaching and co-teaching involving class and support teacher(s). A strong emphasis is placed on the development of oral language skills, phonics and word identification. Motor skills are also developed, including fine motor skills for writing. Mathematics focuses on the development of mathematical language, concepts and procedures, using a wide variety of equipment and other resources. Significant emphasis is placed on the development of social skills.

#### **6. Dealing with emerging needs**

The school has a detailed policy that lays out the assessment approaches used in the school (routine, standardised and diagnostic assessment) as well as external tests conducted by other professionals. Furthermore, the collaborative nature of the school involves the staff and parent/guardians sharing any relevant observations or concerns regarding children's development, on a need-to-know basis. Together, these methods are used as the basis for addressing emerging special educational needs.

#### **7. Providing a continuum of support**

The school adopts a graduated approach, whereby children with complex or enduring needs receive more intense and more individualised supports than those with mild or transient needs. As such, a staged approach to special needs provision is used. At each stage, the starting point is the concerns being expressed about the child, followed by: the gathering of information from a range of sources to explain why the concerns are present; planning; intervention; and review. It should be pointed out, however, that the process is not necessarily linear. For example, a child with significant needs may

enter the school with a diagnosis and a recommendation for resources to be provided at the school support plus level and therefore proceed directly to stage 3.

### **7.1 Stage 1 - classroom support**

If, despite initial classroom adjustments, the parents/guardians, class teacher or other professional(s) remain concerned about the academic, physical, social, behavioural or emotional development of a pupil, the class teacher can administer appropriate screening and profiling measures and complete a stage 1 screening form. At this point, the class teacher devises a simple classroom support plan for extra help within the ordinary classroom setting. Where necessary, parents/guardians are asked to implement aspects of this plan at home. Guidance may be sought from the support team and from external specialists. The class teacher observes the success of the plan and reviews it over an appropriate period of time. If concerns remain after this time, the class teacher consults with the child's parents/guardians and the support team to make further adaptations to the plan or move to stage 2.

### **7.2 Stage 2 - school support**

If stage 2 is initiated, the class teacher provides the stage 1 screening form and subsequent review information to the Principal, who asks the support team to carry out further investigation, using checklists, diagnostic or other testing. If test(s) show that the child meets the school's criteria for support teaching, a learning profile and plan is drawn up by the appointed coordinating teacher, who may either be the class teacher or a member of the support team. This is done in consultation with other relevant staff and parents/guardians. The plan contains details of additional support, which may be provided in class or by means of supplementary teaching.

Support teaching is dependent on DES annual allocation of resources. Teaching is prioritised so that the pupils with the highest level of need receive the highest level of support, as follows:

- Pupils from second to sixth class at or below the 12<sup>th</sup> percentile in literacy
- Early intervention for literacy, Junior Infants to Second Class
- Senior Infants identified by the class teacher through MIST or any other screening instruments as having a difficulty in literacy
- Senior Infants identified by the class teacher, through observation and any other screening measures as having a difficulty in numeracy
- Pupils from second to sixth class at or below the 12<sup>th</sup> percentile in numeracy
- Early intervention for numeracy, junior infants to second class
- Pupils from third to fifth class at the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> percentile in literacy and numeracy
- Pupils who could benefit from a programme set up for a child in receipt of support by joining this child's programme, provided that this would not disadvantage the child who is entitled to support. This support could be based on curricular, social or emotional needs.

If significant concerns exist after an agreed period of time (for example, one term), the coordinating teacher consults with the child's parents/guardians and relevant staff to make further adaptations to the plan or move to stage 3. Relevant external professionals may be consulted at any time.

### **7.3 Stage 3 - school support plus**

If it is agreed by all parties concerned that further assessment is desirable, the Principal appoints a coordinating teacher to draw together all previously gathered information. The Principal may then request a needs assessment from a relevant specialist professional, in consultation with the child's parents/guardians. Parents/guardians may choose to have their child assessed privately. Where a diagnosis of disability is made, an individual education plan is drawn up, which is reviewed at least annually, and appropriate arrangements are put into place. A child with a high incidence disability (for example, dyslexia) is given support either in the classroom and/or from the support team. A child with a low incidence disability (for example, autism spectrum disorder), is given support by the support team, in accordance with DES guidance. Access to services and other resources is sought from the SENO, who continues to review support to the school as necessary.

## **8 Approaches to support teaching**

The support team tailors its teaching approaches to meet the individual needs of the pupils. These may include, amongst other approaches: team teaching with class teachers in the classroom; early intervention work in the junior classes; one-to-one teaching in the support teacher's room; group teaching in the support teacher's room; classroom-based teaching that is targeted at a specific child but benefits the entire class; and class teaching whilst the class teacher withdraws one or more pupils for supplementary teaching. All teachers are required to be cooperative and flexible about timetabling matters in order to facilitate the above.

## **9 Decrease or discontinuation of support**

It should be recognised that sometimes, decisions may be made to decrease or discontinue support as individual children's support needs diminish relative to those of other children. One example is if a child reaches the 12th percentile in literacy or numeracy, although there are many other possible examples. NCSE Appeals Process is available for decisions issued in respect of SNA and Additional Resource Teaching hours.

## **10 Support for children for whom English is an additional language**

The DES provides limited support for children for whom English is an additional language under its General Allocation Model. The school makes every effort to ensure that any such pupils are placed in an age appropriate class; are settled into the school community; are provided with essential translation and interpretation services; and receive any other possible supports.

## **11 Exemption from Irish**

The school seeks exemption from the learning of Irish from the DES if requested to do so in writing by the child's parents/guardians. However, it should be noted at the outset that the DES only grants such exemption in very limited circumstances according to strict criteria laid out in its departmental circulars ([http://www.sess.ie/sites/default/files/pc12\\_96\\_0.pdf](http://www.sess.ie/sites/default/files/pc12_96_0.pdf)). Pupils continue to participate in oral and aural aspects of the Irish curriculum.

## **12 Support for exceptionally able children**

Some pupils may have a diagnose of exceptional ability from an external professional. Some pupils may be identified by the school. The DES does not provide additional resources for pupils who are exceptionally able. However, where possible, their needs are met within the school through differentiation. This may involve modifying the learning environment, the content of the curriculum, the learning process or the learning product. Examples include: studying subjects in greater depth or at a greater level of abstraction; undertaking individual or group project work; and encouraging independence and high mobility around the classroom and school. Where resources allow, a pupil who is exceptionally able may have the opportunity to work in an acceleration group, either inside or outside the classroom.

## **13 ASD Classes**

Students in ASD classes will be integrated with mainstream school activities in our school where appropriate. Plans for integration will be set out in IEP. We aim to offer a positive meaningful educational experience, which allows the child to develop to his/her full learning potential. Our ASD classes aim to offer an autism specific learning environment within a mainstream co-educational national school. This setting facilitates optimum inclusion as part of the school community with access to mainstream activities as appropriate. The school operates a policy of reverse integration also.

See enrolment policy for ASD class for further information.

## **14 Out-of-hours activities**

The school coordinates certain activities outside of the ordinary school day. Whilst all reasonable efforts are made to accommodate children with special needs in these activities, it may not be possible to do so on every occasion (for example, if a child requires SNA support) in the absence of parental supervision prior discussion with the principal as to the suitability of the activity for a child with special needs.

## **15 Transfer to post-primary education**

The school is fully aware of the need to make the transfer from primary to post-primary school as smooth as possible for all students, but particularly for those who have special educational needs. Every effort is made to do so, including gradually preparing the children for the necessity to manage with fewer supports and with greater independence.

## **16 Communication**

The success of these procedures depends on effective communication between all relevant parties. In order that the children's needs are best served, it is vital that there is open, honest, timely, cooperative and respectful communication about their special educational needs at all times.

## **16.1 Children**

The disclosure of information about an individual child's special educational need(s) to that child is at the sole discretion of her/his parents or guardians. If it is deemed appropriate by parents/guardians and teachers, a child with special educational needs may be involved in the development of her/his own individual education plan, including a "My feelings about school" interview. Information about children's special educational needs will only be divulged to other children in the school if it is deemed absolutely necessary to do so by parents/guardians, teachers and external professionals. Through SPHE and Learn Together lessons awareness of and sensibility to special needs will be gradually developed in each class without the need to explicitly refer to individual children.

## **16.2 Parents and guardians**

Parents and guardians are encouraged to be as proactive as possible in the sharing of information about their child(ren)'s special educational needs with the school. It is particularly helpful if they do so each time the child(ren) have a new teacher. Close contact is maintained between the school and parents/guardians throughout the school year. Parents and guardians are always the first point of contact when any decisions need to be made about a child with possible or agreed special educational needs. Prior to change taking place, parents and guardians are entitled to input into significant decisions affecting their child. Parents/guardians may request a meeting at any time if they wish to discuss their child(ren)'s special educational needs, with the class teacher and/or support teacher and/or Principal. An SNA may be present at these meetings if deemed appropriate.

## **16.3 Principal**

The Principal liaises on an ongoing basis with external agencies in relation to special educational needs. The Principal sends a letter to parents/guardians at beginning of each school year outlining how special educational needs are addressed within school. Consent may be sought at this time so that the Principal/class/support teachers may communicate with external agencies and professionals throughout the year. The Principal may call a meeting of relevant parties, always including parents/guardians, at any time in order to discuss special educational needs.

## **16.4 Class teachers**

Parents/guardians meet with class teachers for progress meetings each November. If a child is receiving early intervention support before their Middle Infant Screening Test in senior infants, class teachers advise parents/guardians of this informally. After this time, if children are due to receive further support for the first time, meetings will be called with their parents/guardians, either by the class teacher or by a member of the support team. Class teachers may call a meeting of relevant parties, always including parents and guardians, at any time in order to discuss special educational needs.

## **16.5 Support team**

The support team communicates on an ongoing basis with other teachers, SNAs and parents/guardians. Where there is a requirement to discuss practices the team meets on the last working Friday of the month. For children with low incidence needs, the support team organises individual educational planning meetings each September. These include the support teacher, the class teacher, the previous year's SNA (where applicable), the current SNA (where applicable), and

the child's parents/guardians. For children with high incidence needs, support teachers will telephone parents/guardians to explain provision and/or invite them in for a meeting, whatever best suits the parents/guardians. Parents/guardians of children availing of special needs provision meet with relevant members of the support team for progress meetings when support plans are being drawn up or revised. Support teachers also meet parents at the whole school annual Parent-Teacher meetings. Members of the support team may call a meeting of relevant parties at any time in order to discuss special educational needs. Where deemed necessary, support teachers make additional comments on the end of year reports written by class teachers and initiate these.

### **17 Complaints Procedure**

Parents with a complaint must first contact the Special Class, Learning Support Teacher, Resource Teacher or Class Teacher, whichever is appropriate. The complaint is investigated and if not resolved is referred to the Principal. If the matter remains unresolved, it will proceed to the BOM for consideration. (Please see Complaints Procedure on the school website).

### **18 Success Criteria**

- Happy, well adjusted children
- Review and evaluation of IEPs
- Positive inclusion practices
- Good channels of communication with parents
- Positive feedback from children
- Teacher observation
- Results of standardised testing improved

### **19 Monitoring**

The school will evaluate the effectiveness of Special Needs Provision through monitoring standards reached, case samples from children, the views of parents, staff feedback and continued levels of intervention.

### **20 Timeframe for implementation**

This policy will be implemented in May 2016 having been communicated to the school community

### **21 Responsibility for the review**

This policy and these procedures will be amended as a result of changed circumstances, and shall in any case undergo full review in 2018

### **Ratification and communication**

The policy has been in operation since May 2016 having been communicated by the Board of Management by means of circular following ratification at school BOM meeting of April 2016