



Special Educational Needs (SEN) Policy

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1. Introduction

Wicklow Educate Together National School (WETNS) is committed to the Educate Together ethos of equality, inclusion, and child-centred education. We recognise diversity as a strength and believe that every child can thrive when provided with the right environment and supports.

This SEN policy builds on our 2016 policy and has been reviewed and revised in line with recent Department of Education publications and documents.

WETNS strives to:

- Promote equity of access and participation.
- Ensure children with additional needs are valued and respected.
- Provide an inclusive curriculum tailored to individual strengths and needs.
- Build strong partnerships with parents/guardians and external agencies.

2. Legislative and Policy Context

This policy is underpinned by Irish and international law, including but not limited to:

- The Education Act (1998) – right to appropriate education.
- The EPSEN Act (2004) – requirement for inclusive provision and individual planning.
- The Disability Act (2005) – access to services and supports.
- The Equal Status Acts (2000–2018) – prohibition of discrimination.
- UNCRPD (2018) – commitment to inclusive education at national level.

It also draws on key NCSE/Dept. of Education publications including:

- SET Guidelines (2024): promote the Continuum of Support (COS) as a whole-school framework.
- Autism Good Practice Guidance (2022): provides recommendations on learning environments, structured teaching, sensory supports, and inclusion strategies.
- RELATE (2023): outlines how respectful relationships between pupils, staff, and parents are central to effective SEN provision.
- Indicators of Effective Practice (2024): outlines key standards and observable features of high-quality teaching, learning, leadership.

3. Guiding Principles

Our SEN policy is guided by:

- Inclusion and Belonging: All pupils are part of the WETNS community.
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL): Teachers plan proactively for diverse learners by offering multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression. This enables flexible teaching that anticipates learner variability and removes barriers to participation
- Continuum of Support: Supports are tiered to pupil need, ranging from classroom strategies to intensive individualised support.
- Strengths-Based Practice: We focus on what pupils can do and use these strengths to build confidence and resilience.

- Collaborative Practice: Effective SEN provision depends on teamwork between teachers, SNAs, parents, pupils, and external agencies.
- RELATE Principles: All interactions are grounded in respect, empathy, listening, acceptance, trust, and equality.

It should be read alongside all other school policies including but not limited to: Code of Behaviour, Bí Cineálta, AUP, Communication and Data Protection, Child Protection and Safeguarding, Enrolment.

4. Aims and Objectives

Our SEN policy seeks to:

1. Provide all pupils with access to a broad, balanced, and meaningful curriculum.
2. Differentiate teaching to meet diverse learning needs.
3. Identify emerging needs early and respond effectively.
4. Foster pupil independence, wellbeing, and lifelong learning skills.
5. Develop inclusive teaching practices across the whole school.
6. Build capacity among staff through continuous professional development (CPD) and collaborative learning.
7. Ensure smooth transitions between school stages and into post-primary.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 Board of Management (BOM)

- Ratifies and reviews this policy.
- Has a statutory governance duty to ensure that appropriate systems and procedures are in place to ensure school resources, including grants, staffing and other resources, are managed appropriately and correctly, and in a manner that provides for appropriate accountability to the relevant parties as per Section 15 of the Education Act, 1998 and Department Circular 0064/2024.
- Reviews the School Provision Plan in consultation with the Principal.
- Supports a culture of ongoing professional development in SEN and inclusion.

5.2 Principal & Deputy Principal

- Lead the development of a whole-school inclusive culture.
- Oversee assessment and planning processes.
- Coordinate deployment of SETs and SNAs.
- Liaise with parents/guardians, and external agencies including NEPS, HSE services, and NCSE personnel.
- Support transitions between class levels, from pre-school, to other schools and to post-primary education.
- Provides details of the deployment of Special Education Teaching Resources to the BOM in compliance with Section 15 of the Education Act, 1998 and Department Circular 0064/2024.
- Shares details of the School Provision Plan with the BOM.

5.3 Support Coordinator

- Organises SEN provision and deployment of SETs/SNAs in line with school needs.
- Oversees development and review of Student Support Plans (SSPs) and tracks pupil progress to ensure supports are evidence-based.
- Maintains the School Provision Plan and reports to the Principal at regular intervals
- Facilitates planning meetings, acts as a contact for parents, and liaises with external agencies.
- Guides use of assessments to identify needs and maintains records of interventions and outcomes.
- Promotes CPD in SEN, inclusion, and UDL, and shares updates from NCSE and Department of Education.
- Supports SEN policy development and compliance, and assists with documentation for BOM, inspectorate, and NCSE as required.

5.4 Class Teachers

- Retain primary responsibility for the progress of all pupils in their class.
- Implement differentiated, UDL-informed teaching.
- Class Teacher develops Classroom Support Plans (Level 1), as well as monitoring, recording and reviewing pupil progress regularly.
- Collaborate with SETs to develop and review Student Support Plans (SSPs).
- Work alongside and guide SNAs in supporting care needs
- Communicate regularly with parents and guardians and work in partnership with them.
- Engage in ongoing CPD in SEN and inclusive education

5.5 Special Education Teachers (SETs)

- SETs provide support across the Continuum of Support working from an assigned caseload of pupils with identified needs at level 2 and 3 support.
- They deliver interventions through:
 - In-class support in the form of team teaching, co-teaching, station teaching etc...
 - Small group or one-to-one withdrawal for targeted interventions.
 - Individualised programmes typically for complex needs.
- SETs collaborate with class teachers to plan lessons, differentiate instruction, and co-develop Student Support Plans (SSPs), as well as monitoring, recording and reviewing pupil progress regularly.
- Liaise with colleagues, the principal and Support Coordinator as well as parents and external professionals (NEPS, HSE, therapists).
- Provide advice and support for colleagues through a collaborative and collegial teaching approach
- Engage in ongoing CPD in SEN and inclusive education

5.6 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)

- Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are a vital part of the support team at Wicklow ETNS. Their primary role is to support the identified additional primary care needs of pupils.
- They promote independence and participation and collaborate with class teachers and SETs.
- SNAs support care and access; they do not have responsibility for teaching or delivering the curriculum.

- SNAs work under the direction of the Principal and the class teacher, ensuring clarity of role and consistency of practice.
- Engage in ongoing CPD in SEN and inclusive education

While teachers retain responsibility for teaching and learning, SNAs contribute by:

- Assisting with safety, mobility, feeding, toileting, and other care-related needs.
- Supporting inclusion and participation in classroom and school activities.
- Encouraging independence and reducing over-dependence.
- Working under the guidance of teachers to implement agreed care strategies.

5.7 Parents/Guardians

- Provide relevant background information.
- Support learning and agreed interventions at home.
- Participate actively in planning and review meetings.
- Work in partnership with school personnel.

5.8 Pupils

- Participate in setting goals and targets where appropriate.
- Express their views through pupil voice initiatives, including “My Thoughts About School” interviews.

6. Identification, Planning, and Review

6.1 Early Identification

- Teacher observation, checklists, and assessments are some of the methods used to identify needs.
- Parents are encouraged to share concerns early.
- Early intervention in literacy is prioritised.
- Links with external professionals help inform support pathways and good practice for pupils with additional educational needs.

6.2 Continuum of Support (COS)

Wicklow ETNS utilises the Continuum of Support (COS) framework developed by NEPS and the Department of Education. This model recognises that children may require different levels of support at different times in their school journey. Supports are flexible, needs-based, and reviewed regularly. It is not a diagnostic model and pupils do not require external assessments, reports, diagnoses or input from external professionals in order to receive additional support teaching for an identified need. All children accessing support at any level of the COS will have a support file opened and an active support plan with time-bound priority targets identified, and strategies to meet these targets implemented. Parents will be involved in the creation of and sign-off of this plan. The timetable for the creation of support plans and their reviews will be determined at the start of each school year by the Principal and Support Coordinator.

Level 1: Classroom Support (Support for All)

- First line of support, provided by the class teacher within the mainstream classroom.
- Involves differentiated teaching, UDL-informed lesson design, visual supports, scaffolding, and flexible group work.
- A Classroom Support Plan will be developed with a small number of short-term SMART targets (e.g., focus on reading fluency, social participation, behaviour etc...).
- Reviews are held regularly to monitor progress being made towards identified priority targets.
- Parents are consulted, and where appropriate, pupils contribute to target-setting.

Typical needs supported at this level include:

- Mild literacy or numeracy difficulties.
- Emerging speech and language needs.
- Social skills development (turn-taking, group work, peer relationships).
- Low-level attention or concentration difficulties.
- Emotional wellbeing supports (e.g., worry box, relaxation strategies).
- Temporary difficulties linked to absence, family change, or minor illness.
- Differentiated extension for exceptionally able pupils.

Level 2: School Support (Support for Some)

- Provided when a child continues to experience difficulties despite classroom supports or following an in-school assessment/test (e.g. standardised testing)
- Involves targeted interventions delivered by a Special Education Teacher (SET) through team teaching, in small groups or one-to-one, in collaboration with the class teacher.
- A School Support Plan is drawn up, recording strengths, needs, details of assessments, strategies, and SMART targets.
- Reviews are held regularly to monitor progress being made towards identified priority targets.
- Parents and the child are actively engaged in planning and review.

Typical needs supported at this level include:

- Moderate difficulties in literacy or numeracy that have not responded to Classroom Support.
- Ongoing speech and language difficulties affecting learning.
- Social, emotional, and behavioural challenges requiring structured intervention.
- Identified needs such as mild general learning disability, dyslexia, or dyspraxia.
- Pupils with exemptions from Irish, where timetabling allows for targeted support.
- Pupils learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) who require structured language teaching.
- Pupils with moderate needs as a result of an identified condition or diagnosis (e.g. autism, a specific syndrome, DCD, DLD, etc...)

Level 3: School Support Plus (Support for a Few)

- Designed for pupils with complex, enduring, or multiple needs.
- Requires intensive, individualised interventions and often involves external professionals (e.g., NEPS, HSE therapists, CAMHS). However, this is not essential.

- A comprehensive Student Support Plan (SSP) is created, with detailed-SMART targets and strategies across academic, social, emotional, and care domains.
- Reviews are held regularly (at least once per term) to ensure provision remains effective and that the targets identified are still the priorities, with any progress in meeting these targets noted.
- Parents and the child are actively engaged in planning and review.

Typical needs supported at this level include:

- Pupils in special classes (Autism Classes) who have tailored individualised programmes.
- Students with severe or significant emotional behavioural needs to the extent that these behaviours of concern are impacting on a student's ability to learn, to function independently and to participate fully in school life.
- Significant needs in cognitive functioning and independence/daily living skills (including students who have moderate to severe or significant/profound learning disability)
- Significant needs in social communication, social interaction combined with rigid repetitive patterns of behaviour
- Significant needs with physical and/or sensory functioning (including students who are deaf or have severe to profound hearing loss and students who are blind or have severe to profound visual impairment)

The COS ensures that the level of intervention matches the pupil's level of need. Most pupils' needs are addressed through Classroom Support, some require School Support, and a smaller number with more complex needs require School Support Plus.

The key principle of the COS is that pupils may move between levels or begin at level 2 or 3 depending on their progress and changing needs. The model is flexible, ensuring that support is needs-driven, not diagnosis-driven.

The specific criteria used to allocate a child to a level of support on the continuum is reviewed and adjusted each year by the principal and support coordinator based on the needs in the school at that time along with the resources allocated to meet those needs.

7. Allocation and Deployment of Resources

7.1 Allocation of SETs

- All schools receive a SET allocation from the NCSE (Circular 0013/2017). This is published and available to view on the NCSE website.
- The allocation is school-based, and is not specific to individual pupils.
- The Department of Education bases the allocation on the following criteria: 25% on Enrolment; 68.5% on Educational Needs Profile; 6.5% to support Educational Disadvantage
- The Principal and Support Coordinator deploy SET hours flexibly to meet needs equitably across the school.

7.2 Allocation of SNAs

- All schools receive an SNA allocation from the NCSE, communicated annually. This is published and available to view on the NCSE website.
- SNAs are not assigned to individual children but are allocated to the school. This allows flexibility so that pupils with the greatest care needs receive the highest levels of support at any given time (NCSE, 2024).
- The allocation is informed by the profile of care needs within the school, including those in mainstream classes and special classes and is subject to review each year.

7.3 Deployment of SNAs

- The Principal, in consultation with the Support Coordinator and relevant school staff, oversees the deployment of SNAs to ensure equitable, effective support.
- SNAs may rotate between pupils and classes during a school year and will rotate throughout a pupil's time accessing SNA support. This is to:
 - Avoid over-dependence
 - Foster pupil independence
 - Build SNA expertise across settings and transfer and share skills amongst staff
- Deployment is regularly reviewed to ensure that supports match current pupil needs as outlined in Student Support and Care Plans.
- In line with NCSE guidelines (2024), the school engages in periodic reviews of SNA usage and care needs in consultation with parents/guardians and external professionals (where applicable).

8. Placement and enrolment of Pupils with Autism in a Special (Autism) Class

Parents or guardians seeking a place in the Autism Class must notify the NCSE via the Parents Notify system before the date specified on their website each school year.

Placement is contingent upon:

- A formal diagnosis of Autism (DSM-IV/V or ICD-10/11).
 - Professional evidence of complex or severe learning/support needs, with rationale for Autism Class placement.
 - A supporting letter from the NCSE confirming eligibility.
 - Upon approval, the Board of Management (BOM) ensures that the school's admission policy accommodates Autism Class enrolment in compliance with NCSE and Department guidelines.
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- The Principal in consultation with the SENO coordinates the placement process, including enrolment procedures, timetabling, and transition planning.
 - As outlined in Circular 0023/2025, placements must be reviewed at least annually, involving parents, teachers, and professionals, to assess suitability and consider adjustment or reintegration.
 - Placement is based on need—not just diagnosis—and supports are intended to be dynamic, reflecting progress, strengths, and opportunities for inclusion within the mainstream classroom.

9. Inclusion of Pupils with a placement in a Special Class (Autism)

- Our ASD classes follow NCSE Autism Good Practice Guidance (2022).

- Pupils benefit from structured environments, sensory supports, and evidence-based interventions.
- Inclusion with a mainstream class is planned individually, with reverse inclusion also supported.
- Emphasis is placed on communication, social interaction, and independence.
- Staff receive CPD in autism-specific strategies as required (e.g., TEACCH, PECS, social stories).

10. Teaching Approaches to support all pupils

10.1 Whole-School Approach to Timetabling

- Timetabling of additional support at Wicklow ETNS is guided by the SET Guidelines (NCSE, 2024), which recommend flexibility, collaboration, and prioritisation of need.
- The Principal and Support Coordinator, in consultation with SETs and class teachers, organises timetables at the start of each year and reviews them termly to ensure supports remain responsive.
- Priority is given to pupils with the greatest level of need, while ensuring all supports are delivered in a way that minimises disruption to core learning and class inclusion.

10.2 Models of Support Delivery

A variety of models of teaching are used to meet pupil needs including:

- In-class support (e.g. co-teaching, station teaching, team teaching).
- Small group withdrawal (targeted literacy/numeracy/social skills intervention).
- Individual withdrawal (for highly specific or intensive interventions, e.g., use of assistive technology, implementation of a behaviour support plan, or targeted literacy/numeracy work).
- Blended approaches where pupils benefit from a combination of in-class and withdrawal support.

10.3 Pupils with Exemptions from Irish

- In line with Department of Education guidance (*Circular 0054/2022 – Exemptions from the Study of Irish*), a small number of pupils may be formally granted an exemption from Irish. This means they are exempt from the formal requirement to study the Irish language; it does not represent an exclusion from Irish learning opportunities.
- Wherever appropriate, pupils with exemptions continue to participate in aspects of Irish learning, particularly oral and cultural elements, to support inclusion and a sense of belonging.
- In some cases, additional support teaching may be timetabled during Irish periods, but this is not automatic. Decisions are made flexibly, taking into account:
 - The pupil's individual learning needs
 - The importance of ensuring they do not consistently miss the same curricular areas
 - Equity across all support timetables

10.4 Specialist Assistive Technology (AT) Devices

- Pupils with access to Department of Education grant-funded school assistive technology devices (e.g., laptops, tablets, communication devices) are supported through timetabled sessions as much as possible.
- SETs collaborate with class teachers to ensure pupils are confident in using AT to access the curriculum (e.g., text-to-speech, speech-to-text, communication software).
- Where necessary, specific skill-building sessions are timetabled to allow pupils to learn how to use AT independently and effectively, while integration into mainstream classroom learning remains the goal.
- Class teachers ensure that AT use is embedded across the curriculum, and not restricted to additional support sessions. This is done in collaboration with the SET.
- SNA support where appropriate is used to maximise the efficacy of AT in supporting pupils' additional needs.

11. Role of Early Intervention and Team Teaching in Infant Classrooms

- Class teachers and SETs work together in the infant classrooms, using station teaching, in-class support, and co-teaching, ensuring pupils receive targeted help without missing whole-class activities.
- In the infant years, early observation, screening (e.g. BIAP, MIST, checklists), and teacher input are used to identify emerging learning, language, motor, or social needs.
- Targeted small group and short, focused withdrawal 'booster' sessions are provided to support oral language, phonological awareness, early literacy, numeracy, fine motor, and social-emotional skills.
- Parents are informed early and supported with simple strategies to reinforce language, reading, motor and social skills at home

12. Transitions

Transitions are carefully planned to ensure continuity of learning.

- Class-to-class transitions: handover meetings, pupil profiles, file reviews.
- Primary to post-primary: use of NCSE Transition Passports, visits to new schools, preparatory programme, joint planning meetings.
- Pre-school to primary: links with parents and pre-schools, as well as external agencies where appropriate. Visits, meetings in advance of starting. Parental questionnaire, Mo Scéal from pre-schools/Montessori Schools.
- Transfer to and from other schools (including special schools/classes): links with other school including meetings between class/SET teachers, sharing of pupil file including support/care plans, sharing of assessment/attainment results, visit with pupil and parents where possible in advance of transfer
- ASD class transitions: gradual inclusion into mainstream and supported visits to post-primary and other provisions.

12. Monitoring and Review

- SEN provision is evaluated through analysis of pupil progress, parent feedback, teacher reflection, and pupil voice.
- Policy effectiveness is reviewed by the In-School Leadership Team and reported to the BOM.

- Formal policy review every three years or as required by new NCSE/Dept. of Education guidance.

13. Success Criteria

- Pupils achieve progress in line with individual goals.
- Meaningful inclusion is visible in classroom practice and school life.
- Parents and pupils feel supported and heard.
- Staff report increased confidence and capacity in SEN provision.
- Pupil attainments in all areas being supported are evidenced.

14. Ratification and Review

This policy was drafted in consultation with the school community.

The policy was formally ratified by the Board of Management at its meeting on 25th September 2025.

This policy will be reviewed as part of the school's ongoing policy development cycle, or earlier if necessary in response to legislative changes, Department of Education circulars or guidelines, or the evolving needs of the school community.

A copy of the ratified policy is available to all staff and parents/guardians and will be published on the school website.

Signed:

Daniel Vickers

Chairperson, Board of Management

Date: 25th September 2025

Appendix A – List of Acronyms used in this document

WETNS – Wicklow Educate Together National School

SEN – Special Educational Needs

SET – Special Education Teacher

SNA – Special Needs Assistant

COS – Continuum of Support

NEPS – National Educational Psychological Service

HSE – Health Service Executive

NCSE – National Council for Special Education

UDL – Universal Design for Learning

AUP – Acceptable Usage Policy

AT – Assistive Technology

Efl – Exemption from Irish