

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Policy

The Board of Management (BOM) takes into consideration the fact that some pupils have special educational needs. These may be the result of a range of physical, sensory, social/emotional and/or learning disabilities, or due to English not being their first language, or because they have exceptional abilities. The ethos of the school is one of respecting diversity and of appreciating the unique characteristics of each child. Our goal is to ensure that no child is an outsider. 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; all pupils can learn and grow at their own pace; all pupils are allowed to reach their potential; all pupils gain self-knowledge, self-respect and feelings of positive empowerment; and all pupils 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 on children, the sharing of responsibilities, the sharing of professional knowledge, 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.

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

Procedures

1 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, including appropriate training for all staff working with children who have special educational needs. 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, 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. Her duties are assumed by the Deputy Principal in 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. 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 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.

1.4 Special Education Teachers

A team of resource and learning support teachers (hereafter, 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. The support teachers are encouraged to upskill on a continual basis in the evolving field of special educational needs provision.

1.5 SNAs

SNAs are recruited to assist schools in providing a range of care needs to pupils with assessed special educational needs. When the school enrolls any children with special intimate care needs, carefully considered plans are implemented with the consent of all parties involved.

The Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO – see section 1.7) allocates SNA numbers. 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.

1.6 Parents and guardians

Parents and guardians are encouraged to develop their children's early and ongoing oral language, reading, mathematical and social 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, including progress meetings.

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

The school facilitates a support group for parents and guardians of children with special educational needs that meets regularly.

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 providing services for specific needs.

2 Alleviation

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.

3 Early intervention

When difficulties arise in the early years, a variety of 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. Numeracy focuses on the development of mathematical language, concepts, procedures, problem solving and creative thinking, using a wide variety of equipment and other resources. Significant emphasis is placed on the development of social skills. Motor skills are also developed, including fine motor skills for writing.

4 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.

5 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.

5.1 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.

5.2 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. In addition to the support provided for children with diagnosed low incidence and high incidence needs, other children receive support in the following priority order:

- Pupils from second to sixth class at or below the 12th percentile in literacy
- Early intervention for literacy: junior infants to second class
- Pupils from second to sixth class at or below the 12th percentile in numeracy
- Early intervention for numeracy: junior infants to second class
- Pupils from third to fifth class at the 13th to the 20th 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.

5.3 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 (IEP) 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.

6 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. One-to-one teaching generally takes place in the corridor or in the Special Education Teacher's room with the door open. If an open door is a distraction to a child, the teacher and child sit where they can be seen through the glass panel. All teachers are required to be cooperative and flexible about timetabling matters in order to facilitate the above.

7 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.

8 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.

9 Exemption from Irish

An exemption from the learning of Irish may be sought in accordance with DES rules. Parents/guardians must make a request in writing. The exemption will only be granted in very limited circumstances according to strict criteria laid out in departmental circulars.

10 Support for exceptionally able children

The DES does not provide additional resources for pupils who are exceptionally able. However, where possible, their needs are met 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 school. Where resources allow, a pupil who is exceptionally able may have the opportunity to work in an extension group, either inside or outside the classroom.

11 Seomra Sonais

The school has developed a sensory room called Seomra Sonais ('Room of Happiness') for use by teachers, together with the SNAs, during school hours. This was done primarily to provide a therapeutic environment for any children experiencing temporary or ongoing sensory needs, although all children in the school are given the opportunity to avail of the facility from time to time. Withdrawal to Seomra Sonais will never be used as a sanction.

12 Transfer to post-primary education

The school is fully aware about 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 operate with fewer supports and with greater independence and liaising where necessary with post-primary schools. A transition to secondary school programme is delivered to sixth class pupils when required.

Primary schools are required by the DES to provide secondary schools with information regarding children's low incidence needs.

13 Mainstreaming

From time to time, the school may be in a position to facilitate visits to a mainstream classroom by a child from a special school setting, where this is part of the child's IEP formulated in that school. Any such arrangement will adhere to any relevant DES guidelines and be decided on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration both the child's needs and the school's capacity to meet those needs.

14 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.

14.1 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. Information about children's special educational needs will only be divulged to other children in the school if it is deemed necessary to do so by parents/guardians, the Principal, other teachers, and with advice from external professionals.

14.2 Parents and guardians

Parents and guardians have a responsibility 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) has/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 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 if they wish to discuss their child(ren)'s special educational needs, with the class teacher and/or support teacher and/or Principal. SNAs may be involved in any such meetings if desired by the parents/guardians and agreed by the school.

14.3 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.

The Principal may call a meeting of relevant parties at any time in order to discuss special educational needs.

14.4 Class teachers

Parents/guardians meet with class teachers for progress meetings which are usually held in term 2.

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. If, after the results of the Middle Infant Screening Test, children are due to receive 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.

At the end of each school year, class teachers meet for the purposes of 'handing over' students, including students with special educational needs. Where this is not possible (for example, in the case of a new teacher being recruited during the holiday period), alternative arrangements will be made for the appropriate handover of information about pupils.

Class teachers may call a meeting of relevant parties at any time in order to discuss special educational needs.

14.5 Support team and SNAs

The support team meets regularly and communicates on an ongoing basis with the Principal, other teachers, SNAs and parents/guardians.

For each child with low incidence needs, an in-school meeting is held in early September each year, which is attended by the relevant class teacher, the support teacher(s), the previous year's SNA and the current year's SNA (if the child has been in receipt of SNA support). This is followed by IEP meetings also organised by the support team each September. IEP meetings include the child's parents/guardians, the class teacher and the support teacher(s). Current SNAs are involved as necessary to discuss the individual child's care needs.

For children with high incidence needs, support teachers will contact parents/guardians to explain provision and/or invite them in for a meeting, whichever best suits the parents/guardians.

Parents/guardians of children in receipt of support teaching meet with relevant members of the support team at the progress meetings (see 14.4).

Members of the support team may call a meeting of relevant parties at any time in order to discuss special educational needs.

Support teachers may make additional comments on the end of year reports written by class teachers and initial these. Where a support teacher has primary responsibility for a curricular area s/he writes on the report and initials it.

15 Review

This policy and these procedures will be amended as a result of changed circumstances, and shall in any case undergo full review in 2021.

Approved by the BOM on 26 November 2018