

School Policy for Students with Special Needs 2011-2012

We welcome all students to our school, regardless of ability.

We welcome students with physical disabilities, learning disabilities and gifted students. We endeavour to do our best to help students with special educational needs, within the limits of the resources granted to us from the Department of Education and Science. Our status as a DEIS school means that additional resources are available to enhance services to the Special Needs Department.

We ask parents/guardians of students with special educational needs to make contact with our Principal at the earliest opportunity, to discuss the student's specific difficulties and needs. The Principal can then apply for extra resources from the Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO), if the need arises.

It is our policy to involve both the student with special educational needs, and his/her parents/guardians, in any major decision making which may affect his/her education and welfare within our school.

We encourage students with special educational needs to remain in our school after their Junior Certificate, and participate in our Senior Cycle Programmes. We offer the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme as well as the Leaving Certificate Established.

We have facilities for students in wheelchairs, or with mobility difficulties. Recent investment has meant that our building has been made more accessible and student friendly.

Roles and Responsibilities

Our policy is that students with special educational needs are the responsibility of all members of staff.

Management, Year Heads and Class Tutors have important roles in supporting, encouraging and teaching these students. The Special Needs Co-ordinator and Resource Teachers also have a special role in supporting and teaching these students.

We welcome Special Needs Assistants into our classrooms, and appreciate the support they give to students with special educational needs.

Gathering Information and Entrance Tests

All students entering first year sit various entrance tests, while they are in sixth class in Primary School. One of these tests is a reading test, one is a basic spelling test and one is a maths test. Assessment of students is done within Department of Education and Science guidelines. Nationally recognised assessment instruments are used, such as The Cognitive Assessment Test (CAT).

Any new student entering first, second or third year, who has not sat our entrance test is required to complete an assessment on numeracy and literacy. We will then be in a position to place such new students into the appropriate classes for English and Maths. The Principal or Deputy Principal and Special Needs Co-ordinator will arrange the appointment for the test.

In accordance with our Admission Policy, our Principal requests Primary Schools fill in an Ability Profile Form (see appendix 1) for each student entering first year, (including students who are late applicants). One of the reasons for obtaining these ability forms is to ascertain if new students have physical or learning disabilities or an educational psychological assessment.

One copy of the ability form is given to the Year Head, one copy is giving to the Co-ordinator of the Special Needs Department and the original is given to our Career Guidance teacher – who stores all entrance tests on individual files.

Our Principal requests similar information for students who are moving from other second level schools into our school. Parents must give a copy of their child's most recent school report to our school, before starting with us. Our Principal asks both the parents of the new student, and the student's old school if the new student has any physical or learning disabilities, or has ever had an educational psychological assessment.

Our school aims to ensure that at least one of the resource teachers meets with the resource teachers in the Primary Schools on an annual basis. The purpose of these meetings is to collect information which may be of assistance in supporting/teaching new students who have special educational needs.

If any new student has an educational psychological assessment, our Principal requests (written) permission from the parents/guardians of that student to obtain a copy of the assessment. A copy of this assessment is given to the Co-ordinator of the Special Needs Department and a further copy stored with the student's records in the Guidance Councilor's office.

Class Groupings and Structure for Students with Special Educational Needs

Each week, some class periods are to be timetabled for the resource teachers to teach and support the students with the most serious learning difficulties. Some of these classes will involve individual tuition. These students can be drawn from either the Junior or Senior Cycle. The resource teachers analyse the needs of the students and follow targeted, structured and systematic programmes, where there is be a focus on a specific learning target for each class. (This is not an I.E.P – which would require considerable resources and time, and structured meetings between staff, parents and the student).

Other teachers, with classes available in their timetable, may also be allocated students who have special educational needs by the management. Priority is usually given to students with basic literacy / numeracy or behavioural difficulties.

Our school operates a mixed ability policy for all classes and subjects, with the exception of English, Irish and Maths. One of our reasons for operating this policy is to promote the social integration of all students, regardless of ability. A consequence of this policy is that all mixed ability classes will have some students with special educational needs in them.

For English, Irish and Maths only, our school operates a policy of streaming, i.e. from the data we collect, students are placed into classes according to their abilities in these subjects. We always try to keep the number of students in the “weaker” classes to a minimum, for example, the number of students in the bottom Junior Certificate Maths class will ideally be limited to a maximum of ten.

The resource teachers make out the list of students who enter the “weaker” English and Maths classes. (Students who make excellent progress do move to “better” classes.) Our Guidance teacher makes out the lists of students who go into all other classes. Ideally, trained resource teachers will teach the “weaker” classes in English and Maths up to Junior Certificate.

In exceptional circumstances, our school may allow some students with serious learning difficulties, to reduce the number of subjects they are studying. For example, if a student has serious difficulty with basic English and had an exemption from Irish, we would try (resources permitting), to give extra English classes to that student instead of Irish.

An eleven o’ clock club is available to students with SEN. The club is supervised by a member of the school staff and provides a safe place where students can enhance their social and communication skills.

Sharing Information with Staff

Special Educational Needs is on the agenda of all regular staff meetings. This means all members of staff have an opportunity to share concerns, or helpful insights they may have about any particular student. Such discussion focuses on ways of helping students in difficulty. Parents can be assured that any discussion of students with SENs will always be carried out in a sensitive, caring and professional manner.

The first staff meeting of each academic year is particularly important for students with special needs, as we list new students who have serious difficulties, e.g., dyslexia, hearing or visual impairments, students on medication, etc. Any member of staff who possesses such important information is requested to share it with colleagues.

Ideally, an annual “dissemination of information” meeting will be held during the last week of September or the first week of October; for all teaching staff and special needs assistances. The function of this meeting is to share relevant information about specific students with special needs. We focus on how different individual students learn best.

The rationale for having this meeting one month into term is to afford teachers the opportunity to observe the abilities of each student. It also gives us the opportunity of completing some tests and sharing the results of these tests, such as the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability.

A card index system is in place, which contains basic information about SEN students. The SEN Co-ordinator is responsible for the updating and security of these cards. The cards contain valuable information about each student with a SEN. Every teacher can access this information, on request and every teacher should be familiar with the recommendations recorded in these cards for the students in their care.

Literacy and Numeracy Enhancement

As part of DEIS testing, all students in first year will be tested using the Group Reading Test (GRT) in September and again retested using form 2 of the GRT in May. All students who have serious literacy difficulties in first year will be tested using the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability, and again retested in second year, using form 2 of NARA. Students who persist with literacy difficulties may again be retested in third year, using either NARA or WRAT 4.

All first year students will be retested in Maths, using WRAT 4 – green form – having already been tested as part of their entrance exam, using the blue form of WRAT 4

We ask all students to borrow books from our school libraries on a regular basis. We encourage parents of students in the “weaker” English classes to help with a bit of reading each night of the week and to sign the students’ journal to show that the reading is being done. Basically, we are trying to foster the habit of regular reading at home.

Other initiatives such as DEAR and Keywords are run on an annual basis to encourage a whole school approach to literacy.

The resource teachers welcome parents/grandparents into our classrooms to help out with annual paired reading programmes, or “fun with maths” programmes, etc. Where such programmes are being considered the resource teacher will explain to the parent/grandparent what is involved and will stay in the classroom at all times to ensure the smooth running of such initiatives. An annual celebration takes place to mark the end of the paired reading programme in co-operation with HSCLO.

Outside Agencies

Each year our school will request NEPS to assess those students who are in need of educational psychological assessments. Such students might have serious learning, or emotional / behavioural difficulties. Priority is usually given to students who have never been assessed before. The severity of the difficulty is also be a factor in prioritizing students for assessment. The Principal and resource teachers help to fill in the application forms for these assessments.

The school applies to the State Examinations Commission to enter students who are entitled to reasonable accommodation in certificate exams. We also endeavour to facilitate all such students with similar accommodation in our Christmas and Easter exams. It is the responsibility of the Special Needs Co-ordinator and the Principal to apply to the Examinations Commission for this accommodation.

From time to time, the school may request other outside agencies to assess and to assist the students with special needs, e.g. Lucena Clinic, occupational therapists, etc

Every year, the Principal and Special Needs Department in consultation with the staff, will try to organise a two hour in-service on some aspect of teaching students with special educational needs.

Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP)

All students in the “weaker” classes doing the Junior Certificate in English, Irish and Maths are automatically entered into the Junior Certificate Schools Programme. This is a programme which targets students, who may be at risk of “school failure” or who may drop out of school before doing the Junior Certificate. Students who are at risk of early school leaving and are not in the “weaker” classes are also entered into the JCSP. The students get their JCSP certificates in addition to sitting their normal Junior Certificate.

Where students with special educational needs are in mixed ability classes, teachers are requested to consider entering such students into the JCSP for some of the Learning Statements in their subject area. Teachers who have students in the JCSP are requested to use the “Good Work folders” in the staff room. Any work done by students, which enhances their self-esteem and sense of progress can be placed into these folders; for example, merit certificates awarded, exams completed, etc.

A core team of teachers involved in the JCSP will be time-tabled (on the master timetable) to meet for one class period per week, in order to profile student progress and discuss ways of helping students with special educational needs.

Awards and Encouragement

Teachers are requested to issue merit certificates on a regular basis, and at the end of year celebrations, students with special educational needs, who have made the effort to learn, will be acknowledged and rewarded with school certificates.

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on _____.

Signed: _____
Chairperson of Board of Management

Signed: _____
Principal

Date: _____

Date: _____

Date of next review: January, 2013