



Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School

Policy and Practices for students with Special Educational Needs

INTRODUCTION

We welcome all students with special educational needs to our school. Under the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, which was passed into law in July 2004, a special educational need is defined as:

...a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition.

At Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School, all students with special educational needs are provided with the most inclusive and supportive educational experience insofar as possible within the limits of resources awarded to us by the Department of Education and Skills.

We ask parent(s) and/or guardian(s) of students with any special educational needs to contact school management, namely the Principal, at the earliest opportunity, in order to discuss a student's specific needs. We ask this because, if necessary, the Principal can apply for resources to cater for the student's needs from the Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO), who works for the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).

RESPONSIBILITIES

It is our policy that all students with special educational needs are the responsibility of all members of teaching and Special Needs Assistant (SNA) staff.

School management, the Principal and Deputy Principal, Year Heads and Class Tutors play an important role in the support and encouragement of students with special educational needs.

The school Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) and the Special Educational Needs Department at the school play a special role in supporting and teaching students with special educational needs.

School management, the Special Educational Needs Coordinator and the Special Educational Needs Department regularly meet as we endeavour to ensure students individual needs are being accommodated.

School SNA staff play a crucial role in supporting students who have been awarded access to this support by the SENCO. SNAs are welcomed into classrooms by all members of teaching staff and their contributions to the educational experience of students with special educational needs are valued by all members of school staff.

It is our policy that we ensure to involve both the student with special educational needs and his or her parent(s) and/or guardian(s) in decisions which may affect the student's education and welfare within our school.

Further to this, it is our policy to always obtain parental/guardian consent to obtain documentation from previous schools and/or external agencies.

GATHERING INFORMATION AND ENTRANCE TEST PROCEDURES

In accordance with our Admissions Policy and Enrolment Procedures, we ask that every parent and/or guardian who wishes to obtain a place in Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School for their son/daughter completes an application form. There is a section on this application form where a parent and/or guardian can indicate whether or not their son/daughter has an educational psychology assessment. If any new student has an educational psychology assessment, it is our policy that our Principal will request written permission from the parent(s) and/or guardian(s) of that student to obtain a copy of that report.

Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School aims to ensure that at least one member of the Special Educational Needs Department meets with the teachers and/or management staff of the primary school annually. The purpose of these meetings is to collect information which may help us to plan to cater for new students with special educational need who are to be enrolled in our school the following academic year.

In the case of a new student joining our school from a different, non-feeder primary school or a new student transitioning into any year group from a different post-primary school, the Principal and/or the Special Educational Needs Coordinator always makes contact with the school in question in order to ensure all necessary information is obtained.

In keeping with Data Protection Laws, any documentation related to students obtained by Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School is securely locked away and kept on school grounds at all times and treated with the strictest confidentiality.

All students joining First Year sit an Entrance Exam while still in Sixth Class in primary school. One of these tests is a reading test, another is a basic spelling test and one is a Mathematics test. All tests used are nationally recognised; the tests used are CAT (Cognitive Abilities Test), Cloze Reading Test (D. Young) and WRAT (Wide Range Achievement Test). Using these assessments means we are more informed when placing students in classes and we can ensure that the most appropriate class is chosen for each student.

CLASS GROUPINGS AND STRUCTURES FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

At Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School, we have a special interest in providing our students with the greatest level of support possible within the limits of resources. Therefore, each year, we timetable a number of Learning Support and Resource classes to support our students with the most significant special educational needs. Priority is generally given to students with basic literacy and numeracy difficulties and to students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Some of these Learning Support and Resource classes are used for individual tuition and some are composed of small groups of students. These classes may be drawn from either Junior Cycle or Senior Cycle classes.

The Special Educational Needs Department analyse the needs of these students and follow specific, targeted, structured and systematic programmes. This is not an Individual Education Plan/Student Support Plan which would require considerable resources and time and structured meetings between staff, parent(s) and/or guardian(s) and the student. For students with

significant difficulties and in receipt of the highest level of support on the Continuum of Support, Student Support Plans are put in place in consultation with staff, parent(s) and/or guardian(s) and the student. The Student Support Plan is then implemented across all classes to the best of each teacher's ability.

Each year, there is a cohort of teachers who are allocated Learning Support and Resource classes by school management. Predominantly, these classes are allocated to teachers who are in the Special Educational Needs Department.

Our school tries to promote the social integration of all students, regardless of ability, and as a result of this all mixed ability classes will have some students with special educational needs.

The timetabled Learning Support and Resource classes focus on Literacy/English and Numeracy/Mathematics however in special circumstances where a student may need support in another subject, we try our best to facilitate this.

The students that will be offered Learning Support and Resource classes are decided by the Special Educational Needs Department in consultation with school management, parent(s) and/or guardian(s) and primary schools or previous schools.

It is our policy to seek written permission from parent(s) and/or guardian(s) of students who are offered Learning Support and Resource classes for them to attend these classes.

In exceptional circumstances, our school may allow some students with significant difficulties to reduce the number of subjects they are studying. For example, if a student has a serious difficulty with English and has had an exemption from studying Irish in primary school/previous school, we may be able to offer extra classes in Learning Support and Resource in place of Irish.

Under the most recent revised circular on the Exemption from the Study of Irish, parent(s) and/or guardian(s) of students who have not previously had an exemption but who wish for their son/daughter to be granted an exemption from studying Irish must apply to the Principal in writing. The Principal will follow the steps set out in the circular and will give the response to the request in writing to the parent(s) and/or guardian(s) of the student and where an exemption is granted, the Principal will issue a Certificate of Exemption. In the case where a student is 18 years or over, a student can make an application himself/herself. It is important to note that an exemption will only be granted only in exceptional circumstances.

ASD CLASS

Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School has a class for students who are on the Autistic Spectrum. The class has a maximum of six students. Students enrolled in this class often integrate with mainstream classes as we try to promote the social inclusion of all students and all teaching staff are aware of which students are in the ASD class. The students enrolled in the ASD class who are in Junior Cycle undertake both Level 2 and Level 3 Programmes, depending on their individual needs.

SHARING INFORMATION WITH STAFF

At the beginning of the year all staff are made aware of new and existing students with special educational needs. Information is shared at a staff meeting specifically on Teaching and Learning and Special Educational Needs. This meeting is important as the Special Educational Needs Team list the students who have significant special educational needs, for example, dyslexia, hearing or visual impairments, Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and any other difficulty students may present with.

Under Data Protection laws, no written information is given to staff with identifying information about students and all information is shared on the basis that it is strictly confidential laws. Furthermore, any discussion about students with special educational needs focuses on ways of helping students in difficulty and parents and/or guardians can be assured that any discussion will be carried out in a sensitive, caring and professional manner.

EXTERNAL AGENCIES AND SERVICES

Each year, we ask NEPS (the National Educational Psychology Service) to assess students who are in need of educational psychological assessments. Such students may have serious learning and/or emotional or behavioural difficulties. Priority is given to students who have never been assessed before. The severity of the difficulty is another factor in prioritising students for assessments. The Principal and members of the Special Educational Needs Team make applications for these assessments to the NEPS psychologist assigned to our school.

Occasionally, when appropriate, the school may request other outside agencies and services such as CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services), to assess students and/or to assist students with special educational needs.

The school applies to the State Examinations Commission (SEC) every year for students who are entitled to Reasonable Accommodations for the Certificate Exams (RACE). It is the responsibility of the Principal and the Special Educational Needs Coordinator to make these RACE applications.

The Principal and the Special Educational Needs Department, in consultation with staff, often try to arrange in-service training on aspects of teaching students with special educational needs.

JUNIOR CERTIFICATE/CYCLE SCHOOL PROGRAMME

All students in Junior Cycle are entered into the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP). This programme runs alongside the Junior Certificate/Junior Cycle Programme and is focused on Statements of Learning in each subject.

Students receive their JCSP certificates before they sit their state examinations.

A core team of teachers are timetabled to meet for one class per week to profile student progress and to discuss ways of helping students with special educational needs if necessary. The Special Educational Needs Coordinator is part of the JCSP core team.

LEVEL 2 LEARNING PROGRAMMES

Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School can offer Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LPs) to students whose special educational needs are such as to prevent them from accessing Level 3 Junior Cycle subjects and/or short courses. It is important to note that there are very specific criteria that need to be met for a student to be eligible to undertake these programmes. These criteria are set out by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

L2LPs can be undertaken by students in the ASD class or in mainstream classes. Teachers are supported by the S.E.N. team in teaching Level 2. Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School identifies an ASD/L2LP Coordinator as a need and priority of the school for the period 2020-2022. The ASD/L2LP Coordinator will work closely with senior management, the S.E.N. team and all teaching and SNA staff and carry out duties related to the ASD class and the L2LPs.

AWARDS AND ENCOURAGEMENTS

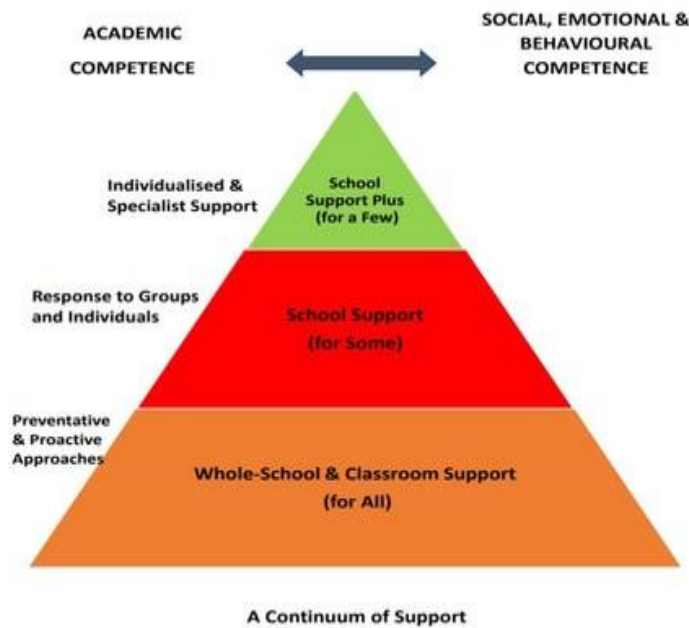
We actively encourage all students with special educational needs to remain in school until they have completed the Senior Cycle Programmes. We offer the Leaving Certificate Established (LCE) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA).

There is a merit system in place in the school for students who make an effort to learn, to participate and to behave. Teachers are encouraged to issue merits regularly to students as a means of positive reinforcement.

WELLBEING

The Special Educational Needs Department recognises the importance of the promotion of student wellbeing. Student wellbeing is fostered in all Learning Support/Resource classes as it is in every other mainstream class and extracurricular activities. Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School adopts a whole-school approach to student wellbeing.

As part of the whole-school approach to the promotion of wellbeing, Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School follows the Guidelines on the Continuum of Support as set out by NEPS. The Special Educational Needs Department plays an important role in following the Continuum of Support in relation to students with special educational needs.



The Special Educational Needs Department puts in place Student Support Files (SSFs) for students with special educational needs who are identified as needing School Support for Some and School Support for a Few in consultation with senior school management, Year Heads, Class Tutors, subject teachers, parents/guardians and students. Each SSF is individualised with individual priority needs and targets on each. SSFs are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that the needs of the student(s) are being met.

Furthermore, throughout the school, there are Wellbeing Spaces* in addition to a Multi-Sensory Room in the ASD Class which students with special educational needs can access during supervised movement breaks from classes.

**Due to COVID-19, the Wellbeing Spaces have been removed*

This policy and these practices will be reviewed annually by the SEN Department in consultation with the Principal and Deputy Principal.

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on 19th October 2021 and is reviewed annually following input from the SEN Department and senior management team.

Signed:

Chairperson of Board of Management

Date: 31st August 2022

Date of next review: October 2023

Signed:

Principal

Date: 31st August 2022