

POLICY FOR THE EDUCATIONAL PROVISION FOR STUDENTS WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS

Additional Needs Department

Holy Family Community School, Rathcoole

29th May, 2019

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1. Introduction

This policy document aims to outline the form that **additional educational support** takes for students with learning difficulties / special educational needs in Holy Family Community School, Rathcoole and to clarify the philosophy which underpins it. It is based on the original policy written in 2004 and like its predecessors, it is written in the context of the Education Act 1998, especially sections 2, 6, 7, 9, 13, 15, 21 and 33 and Equal Status Act published in 2000. It seeks to take account of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act which came into law in 2004 but has yet to be fully implemented at the time of this policy review.

This policy review has been undertaken by the members of the SEN Department as part of the continuing development of the school plan and in consultation with all staff, the Parents' Association, the Students' Council and some outside agencies. It was adopted as official school policy by the Board of Management on 29th May, 2019. This policy should be considered as a working document to be reviewed every three years.

2. Inclusion

2.1 School Website

This policy should be read with the information available on the school website which outlines the education normally provided to all students under the following headings:

- School Vision Statement
- Admission Procedures
- Curriculum
- Creating a Learning Environment
- Student Care
- Physical Education
- Extra Curricular

2.2 Inclusion

It is the policy of the school that the term **all students** in the vision statement includes students with special needs / special educational needs. This policy document sets out to explain how the school works to achieve one of its principal aims, namely to enable these students to access, participate in and benefit from the education **normally provided** in the school to the fullest extent possible and to do so alongside students who do not have difficulties, as far as is practicable. To achieve this principal aim, these students require **additional educational support** which can only be adequately provided where the school is given the necessary additional resources by the Department of Education and Science.

2.3 Terminology

In 1994, the Learning Support Department was set up and the term then in use in the school for additional support provided for students with special needs was *Learning Support*. The word *Resource* was added some years later to allow for greater accuracy and in keeping with the language used in educational circles.

In past years, the term Special Educational Needs (SEN) was introduced and has been used in some titles, for example, the SEN Department and the SEN Coordinator. The new title “Additional Needs Department” has been adopted by the Department of Education and Skills. Learning Support Teachers and Resource Teachers will now be described as Special Education Teachers or SETs.

The term *support* continues to be the most generally used word in the school to describe the work of the Additional Needs Department as it respects the sensitivities of adolescents better than other terms. Respecting the sensitivities of adolescents is an important consideration in all kinds of additional support to students with additional needs.

3. Students with Additional Needs

3.1 Definition

Students with additional needs are:

- Students whose additional needs prevent or hinder them from benefiting adequately from the education normally provided for students of the same age and / or
- Students for whom the education normally provided is not sufficiently challenging i.e. exceptionally able / talented

3.2 Categories

To date the school has provided for the following categories of students with additional needs:

- Borderline Mild General Learning Disability
- Mild General Learning Disability
- Moderate General Learning Disability
- Emotional / Behavioural Difficulties including ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder), ODD (Oppositional Defiant Disorder)
- Specific Learning Disabilities including Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia and Dysgraphia
- Physical / Sensory Impairment including Blind, Visually Impaired, Hearing Impaired
- Forms of Physical Disability that require the use of a wheelchair
- Speech and Language Communication Disorders
- Students on the Autistic Spectrum including those with PDD-NOS (Pervasive Developmental Delay – Not Otherwise Specified)
- Students whose learning difficulties clearly results from socio-economic disadvantage
- EAL students
- Exceptionally Able / Talented

The school has no experience to date of providing for students with the following additional needs:

- Down’s Syndrome
- Severe/Profound General Learning Disability

4. Key Objectives

The educational objectives for students with additional needs are the same as for all students. Three key objectives of particular importance and relevance are:

- Functional Literacy and Numeracy
- Functional social skills
- Success in public examinations at the appropriate level

4.1 Functional literacy and numeracy

Functional literacy and numeracy is a key objective for many students with additional needs and special emphasis is placed on reading, writing, spelling and functional maths. The Literacy and Numeracy Policies should be read in conjunction with this policy.

4.2 Functional social skills

Social skills are essential to enable a person's participation in society, developing relationships and maintaining good mental health. The Additional Needs Department welcomes the introduction of the Wellbeing Programme for all students and sees it as an important mainstream support for the social skills programme provided in support classes to some students.

4.3 Success in public examinations at the appropriate level

All third year students sit the Junior Cert / Junior Cycle Examination and a key objective of this policy is that even students with substantial difficulties / needs can achieve success in the examination, that is, Achieved in English, Achieved in Maths and Achieved in at least 3 other subjects. Great care is taken to ensure that no student fails to achieve this standard and such failure is rare. The vast majority of students with additional needs do substantially better.

Similar objectives are set for the Leaving Certificate (five O6 grades) and for the Leaving Certificate Applied (a Pass) and again most students with additional needs do substantially better in the senior state examinations.

New developments:

The Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement offers an opportunity for recognition of students' broader abilities and a key objective of this policy is to develop a system whereby the mechanism of the JCPA recognises the wider achievements of students with Additional Needs.

The L2LP Programme will be introduced on a pilot basis in the academic year 2019-2020 with the objective of improving our ability to meet the needs of incoming students who have Mild / Moderate Learning Difficulties. The L2LP Programme may be extended in following years, depending on resourcing made available to the school by the NCSE.

5. Admission to the School

Details on admission to the school may be found in the school's Admissions Policy.

6. Physical Disabilities

It is school policy to make the school buildings, general classrooms and specialist classrooms as accessible as possible to people with physical disabilities and to take measures when necessary to ensure that these students have real access to the full curriculum.

7. Transition from Primary to Secondary School

7.1 Gathering of information at time of transfer

The Principal, Deputy Principals and the SEN Coordinator are in regular communication with the Principals and the 5th and 6th class teachers in the main feeder primary schools and visit these schools a few times annually. An Open Night is held for prospective students and their parents prior to enrolment. Parents are required to inform the school, in writing, of any additional needs or medical condition and to forward existing psychological / medical reports when making an application for a place. On the application form, parents give written consent for the release of relevant information about their child from their primary school and from any other appropriate external agencies that support their child. This information is kept securely and in the strictest confidence. All data is processed as per our GDPR Policy.

Information gathered is used for the following purposes:

- To inform teaching and enhance student learning
- To support applications to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) for additional supports on behalf of the student

7.2 Organisation of First Year Classes

There are 7 mixed ability classes in each year in Junior Cycle. Students are allocated to a class on the basis of an entrance assessment and consultation with primary schools after the assessment.

8. The Work of the Additional Needs Department

8.1 Model of support

The model of support used in the school is aligned with the Continuum of Support model developed by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) that is, providing levels of support for all, for some and for few as appropriate, depending on the needs of the students.

Support for All is delivered in the mainstream classroom through varying levels of differentiation. This is largely the responsibility of the mainstream teacher with the Additional Needs Department acting in an advisory role, providing information about individual students' needs through the Additional Needs Register and Student Profiles, presenting in-house training and leading best teaching practice through the development and introduction of whole school approaches to inclusive education.

Support for Some is mostly provided in small groups which allow for more focussed interventions to support students with particular, identified difficulties, for example, classes in reading

comprehension skills for students with Dyslexia. A team teaching model of support is also used, placing a support teacher in the mainstream classroom, for example, an extra Maths teacher to support students with MGLD.

Support for Few is organised for a small number of students in small groups or on a one-to-one basis where it is judged that their individual needs are best supported, for example, small groups meet for social skills training while training in braille is delivered in a one-to-one setting.

8.2 Main Support Framework

Support is delivered at Irish time in all years to students with exemptions from the study of Irish. This time is used to strengthen literacy and numeracy skills according to the needs of the student. Students with diagnosed difficulties who are not exempt from the study of Irish may access support in small classes.

One to one support is comparatively rare in the school and is used when the need of the student makes it necessary, as for example when a student does not have an exemption from Irish or when addressing the need(s) of the student requires individualised support as outlined in the previous section.

The school avails of the services of the Visiting Teacher Services of the NCSE and support from these services is very regular.

Students are sometimes withdrawn from Religion, C.S.P.E. and S.P.H.E. classes for the purpose of accessing support. Such arrangements are made with student and parental permission and in consultation with subject teachers. Every effort is made to keep any withdrawal from Religion, C.S.P.E. and S.P.H.E. to a minimum.

Two important positive characteristics of the above framework of additional support are:

1. It is relatively consistent from year to year and so can be planned for.
2. It can be integrated into the timetable before the school year begins.

8.3 Teachers

The core Additional Needs team comprises of three teachers at the time of this review and will be joined in the next academic year by a newly qualified resource teacher. The team is responsible for the organisation and coordination of the work of the Additional Needs Department. A detailed account of the year's work may be found in the Additional Needs Department plan.

The Coordinator holds the Combined Postgraduate Diploma in Learning Support and Special Educational Needs, the ACELS Certificate for teaching EAL students and the Certificate awarded by the Dyslexia Association of Ireland. One teacher holds a Master's Degree in Education and a Postgraduate Diploma in Special Educational Needs. Two teachers hold the Graduate Diploma in Inclusive Education, Learning Support and Special Education.

In addition, on the main teaching staff,

- One teacher holds a Master's degree in Inclusive Education.
- A number of teachers have completed the Certificate in Dyslexia from the Dyslexia Association of Ireland.
- Some teachers have a qualification and / or have experience of teaching English to students whose first language is not English.
- Many teachers engage in CPD in the area of inclusive education.

Every attempt is made to ensure that the professionally trained members of the Additional Needs Department teach those classes which deliver specialised programmes to provide focussed interventions for students with needs. Since there are more classes providing this additional support to students than there are qualified SETs to teach them, programmes are delivered in some classes by mainstream teachers under the guidance of the SEN Coordinator who oversees the programmes and advises on resources and strategies.

The school has membership of:

- ILSA Irish Learning Support Association
- IATSE Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education

It is important to emphasise here that all teachers in the school have students with additional needs in the **ordinary classroom** and that the ordinary classroom is where education is **normally provided**, as distinct from the **additional support** outlined in this document. Teachers in the school are encouraged and supported in attending special education training courses and CPD courses in order to improve the education provided to students with additional needs and to all students.

8.4 Special Needs Assistants

The school has a team of trained and qualified Special Needs Assistants who provide a valuable form of additional support for students with additional needs. Their work includes:

- Assisting students in moving through the building and ensuring that students are in the right place at the right time.
- Keeping students safe through observation of students, identification of and monitoring of patterns of behaviour and intervention when necessary.
- Supporting students and teachers in practical ways for example, by preparing teaching materials in braille, setting up and maintaining equipment in good working condition, such as assistive technology, acting as scribe – support is individualised to cater for the needs of the student.
- Liaising with Year Heads, Tutors, teachers, parents and the SEN Coordinator and contributing to the creation, review and implementation of support plans for students with special needs.
- Assisting in the drafting, implementing, monitoring and review of Personal Pupil Plans and Student Support Files.

8.5 Reasonable Accommodations in Certificate Examinations (RACE)

The Additional Needs Department applies for reasonable accommodations in state examinations for a number of students with additional needs each year. Strict criteria are laid down by the State Examinations Commission to ensure eligibility for the scheme. Testing and screening for Junior Cycle RACE is ongoing from Christmas of second year to Christmas of third year. For Leaving Certificate students, the testing and screening cycle takes place from August to October of sixth year. The most commonly accessed accommodations are:

1. A waiver in spelling and grammar
2. Assistance of a reader
3. Use of a digital recording device
4. Use of a word processor
5. Access to a separate or small centre.

It should be noted

- that the fact that a student availed of an “accommodation” is indicated on his / her results’ certificate.
- that an “accommodation” availed of in the Junior Certificate may not be granted for the Leaving Certificate.

8.6 Disability Access Route to Education (DARE)

The Additional Needs Department works closely with the Guidance Department in the school in preparing students with additional needs for the transition from secondary school into life after school. Sixth year students may be referred by the Guidance Department to the SEN Coordinator, if appropriate, for the preparation of applications to third level colleges through the DARE scheme. Applications are prepared between February and April.

9. The Curriculum

It is school policy that all students, including students with additional needs should have access to the broad and balanced curriculum provided in the school. Students with additional needs require more flexibility of choice here, and for some, an extra practical subject may be more beneficial than a foreign language. Special care is taken with option subjects to ensure that subjects are chosen that the student will like and in which they will be successful. In rare cases, a reduced timetable is offered to students with very great needs by agreement with the parents. The key issues here are equality of access and parental and student choice.

10. Assessment and Testing

A Standardized Aptitude Test is administered to incoming students in the Spring term before entry. Information from this test is used in two ways, firstly to assist in spreading students across mixed ability classes and secondly to assist the school in identifying students who may have additional needs.

In the early weeks of first year, the NGRT is administered to first years to establish a base line of reading ability amongst the group. This data informs supports for teaching and learning. Informal assessment and testing is carried out as required. The NEPS Continuum of Support documents are particularly useful for this work.

A number of students are referred each year to the school's NEPS (National Educational Psychological Service) Psychologist for psychological assessment.

Testing is also carried out during the year to investigate students' eligibility for Reasonable Accommodations in the Certificate Examinations and the Disability Access Route to Education. Please refer to Sections 8.5 and 8.6 of this document for further information about RACE (Reasonable Accommodations in Certificate Examinations) and DARE (Disability Access to Education).

11. External Agencies

11.1 NEPS' Psychologist (National Educational Psychological Service)

The Additional Needs Department is in regular contact with the NEPS' Psychologist who offers support for all students, with particular reference to students with special needs. The Psychologist supports these students:

- when the school applies for additional supports for them
- by offering advice to students and to their parents as well as teachers
- by supporting the school in the use of the NEPS Continuum of Support
- by meeting with students
- by carrying out psychological assessments.

The Psychologist serves a number of schools in the general area and visits the school regularly during the year. Parents may choose to have their child privately assessed.

It should be noted that at the time of revising this policy, changes in the way in which NEPS supports schools are about to be introduced and a new model of support is expected soon.

11.2 Other External Agencies

Other agencies which support the school are:

- The Visiting Teacher Service – Visiting Teacher of the Blind and Visiting Teacher of the Deaf.
- Department of Child Psychiatry, James's Street, Dublin 8
- Child and Adolescent Services in Clondalkin, Lucan and Kill
- Lucena Clinics
- Primary Care Services
- National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)
- National Council for Special Education (NCSE).
- Various medical specialists, for example, Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists.

12. Individualised Planning

The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN, 2004) outlines the steps to be taken in the preparation of Individual Education Plans (IEPs). The Act foresaw the provision of guidelines for teachers and schools which were published in 2007 in the document "Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs: Post Primary Guidelines". This document describes best practice for teachers and schools in supporting students with special educational needs. The Act clearly and realistically links its aspiration towards the excellent standards described in the guidelines to the provision of "the necessary monies and support services" required to achieve and maintain these standards.

Resources are provided to the school through the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). In clarifying the thinking that underpins its work in 2012, the NCSE notes on its website that "...while certain sections of the Act have been commenced, the implementation of key sections which confer statutory rights to assessment, education plans and appeals processes on children with special educational needs has been deferred due to the current economic circumstances."

While this is true, it is school policy to continue to work in cooperation with the NCSE towards "achieving the ambitions of the (EPSEN) Act in every way possible".

Specifically in the school, this means continuing the process already begun of more individualized diagnosis, planning, provision and evaluation, especially for students with greatest need. A more detailed description of this work may be found in the Additional Needs Department Plan.

Files are securely kept for students with additional needs as required. All incoming students with psychological reports have an Individual Student Profile which outlines their strengths and challenges and provides guidance to their teachers on how best to cater to their needs. Student Support Files are kept for students as required and Personal Pupil Plans are kept for students with SNA access.

All teachers delivering individual or small group support complete term plans and meet the SEN Coordinator for regular review.

13. Evaluation

The evaluation of educational provision is a complex process whether normal provision or additional support is being evaluated. Basic success in the state examinations and basic literacy and numeracy are interlinked. The state examinations are widely used in schools as a blunt measurement of achievement. The success of students with additional needs in the school in state examinations is highly valued, especially by the students themselves and by their parents. Teacher observation, class tests, NEPS checklists, tutor reports, merit awards and house examinations are important regular forms of evaluation for students with additional needs.

14. Parents: Communication and Participation

Communication between teachers and parents has traditionally been good in the school and parents continue to play a positive and mainly supportive role in the education provided to all students. One of the objectives of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004) is “to ensure that parents have a central role in all important decisions concerning the education of their children”. This is already the case for many parents in the school and this policy encourages all parents to play a more central role and to do so more often especially where additional support is provided to students. This policy encourages teachers to inform and involve parents more when additional educational support is being provided.

15. Students

The general body of students responds positively to the education normally provided in the school and students with additional needs are particularly appreciative of the additional support provided. Students tend to play the role of recipient of normal provision and of additional support and this policy encourages them to play a more active role – which is generally more practicable in a support context than in a normal class.

16. Grievance Procedure

Parents / Students who are concerned and who wish to discuss or make suggestions about any aspect of educational provision should approach the relevant teacher, tutor, year head or Additional Needs Coordinator. If necessary, an issue can be dealt with by the Principal, Deputy Principals or Board of Management.

17. Additional Resources

Clearly, the additional support outlined above is dependent on additional resources. Most of these additional resources are granted annually and it is school policy to seek a more permanent arrangement, for example, an ex-quota Resource Post.

18. Conclusion

It is important to re-emphasize the principal objective of the *additional educational support* outlined in this document, namely, to enable students with additional needs to access, participate in and benefit from the education *normally provided* in the school to the fullest extent possible.