



Swords Community College

Special Education Needs Policy 2025/26

Date for Review:

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Signed: _____

Chairperson of Board of Management

Signed: _____

Principal (Secretary to Board)

Date: _____

Date: _____

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1. Introduction/Vision

The principles of inclusivity and respect are enshrined in the Swords Community College Statement of Ethos, and are lived out as much as possible in the day-to-day life of the school. The school aims to provide a caring, happy and safe environment, to foster a love of life-long learning and to develop each person's academic, physical, moral, cultural and spiritual potential.

Swords Community College aspires to be a responsibly inclusive school. Responsible inclusion means working towards what is best for the student, not the teacher, parent aspirations (though considered and parents are considered partners with student and school in decision making), curriculum, public opinion etc. To have Responsible inclusion, schools need a responsible, or total, curriculum which includes all aspects of education in school life (hidden, implied, social skills, life skills, extra-curricular activities etc.) and that considers curriculum as a process and education as development of students rather than content and product.

Inherent in this is an understanding that individual needs or learning differences should not prevent a student from flourishing in Swords Community College. It is our aspiration that if a child is diagnosed as needing support, they will receive whatever assistance they require to enable them to reach their full potential (subject to this support being resourced by the Department of Education and Youth). This will involve a whole-school approach to supporting the child with individual needs.

This policy is in keeping with the Education Act 1998, the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004, The Equal Status Acts 2000-2004 and Circular 14/2017 (new model of allocation) and the corresponding *Guidelines for Post Primary Schools: Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools (2017)*.

2. Aims

Swords Community College aims to:

- Ensure that students with individual needs are educated in a responsibly inclusive environment.
- Ensure that students with special educational needs are identified and provided for in a fair and equitable manner so that their learning potential and their sense of self-worth and dignity is developed and respected.
- Give practical effect to the constitutional rights of children who have a disability or who have other special educational needs, as they relate to education.
- Provide, in line with the new model of allocation, a level and quality of education appropriate to the needs and abilities of all students in the school.

- Affirm that students with special educational needs have the same right to avail of, and benefit from, education as students who do not have those needs.
- Provide for the involvement of parents in the education of their children and in the decision-making process in relation to their children.
- Co-operate and work closely with the National Council for Special Educational Needs (NCSE) and other agencies with regard to the education of students with special educational needs.
- Ensure that all members of staff are aware of the individual needs of students and of the contribution they can make in this area.
- Ensure that special educational needs are not viewed in isolation, but in the context of the whole school and community.
- Ensure that students with individual needs are offered a broad, balanced and differentiated curriculum and that they are provided for in an inclusive way.
- Provide programmes that meet the individual needs of a student. At Junior Cycle such programmes might include Level Two Learning Programmes (L2LPs), Level One Learning Programme (L1LP), Short Courses, Social Skills, Literacy and Numeracy Support. At Senior Cycle programmes might include Senior Cycle Level One Learning Programme (SCL1LP), Senior Cycle Level 2 Learning Programme (SCL2LP), LCA, Skills for Life, Life Skills, Preparation for Work and Preparation for Further Education.
- Ensure that, where appropriate, students can achieve the learning outcomes/intentions of their individual programmes in the mainstream class.
- Set high standards for students with special educational needs and provide them with appropriate guidance, encouraging them to achieve their full potential.
- Develop staff expertise in supporting students with special educational needs.
- Encourage and foster positive partnerships with parents, in order to achieve appropriate support at school and at home.
- Co-ordinate the advice, guidance and support of other agencies in supporting students with special educational needs.
- Ensure the effective and efficient use of resources.
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of practice in support of students with special educational needs.
- Acknowledge the primary responsibility of the subject teacher and work to support them in meeting the needs of the student.

3. The Student

All students attending Swords Community College are unique.

Students attending Swords Community College have a variety of individual needs. We aspire to put the student and not the need first.

These needs may include (but are not restricted to) any of those outlined below.

3.1. Physical Disability/Illness

For example, hearing impairment, wheelchair user, diabetes, cystic fibrosis etc.

3.2 Emotional/Behavioural Problems

Typically ADHD, but other disorders can apply. These are NOT “bold” children, and with the right support and/or medication can thrive in a “mainstream” school.

3.3 Specific Learning Difficulty

Dyslexia – difficulty reading

Hyperlexia – difficulty with comprehension

Dyscalculia – difficulty with numbers

Dysgraphia – difficulty with writing

Dyspraxia – difficulty with motor skills.

3.4 General Learning Disability (GLD)

Students can present with a borderline Mild, Moderate or Severe and Profound General Learning Disability. While students with low Moderate and Severe and Profound GLD may require special schooling, we welcome students with GLDs to our school and mainstream classrooms. Teachers of students with GLD can access a variety of teaching tools and advice from the SEN Team, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) Guidelines for students with GLD and the Special Education Support Services (SESS). It is envisaged that students with Borderline Mild and High Mild GLD will participate in the new Junior Cycle framework at Level 3 while students who cannot access Level 3 can avail of the Level 2 Learning Programmes.

3.5 Autistic Spectrum Disorders

Autism is a condition that involves difficulties with

- Social Interaction
- Language and Communication
- Behaviour.

The idea of a “spectrum” is that most people exhibit some autistic traits – just having one or two does not mean a child has Autism. Children with Asperger’s Syndrome are often high-functioning and can cope very well in a mainstream setting.

Many students with Autism can cope well with typical SEN support. An “Autism Classroom” is sometimes offered for students who have more profound or complicated autistic traits, but plenty of students with Autism do not require such support. Equally, just because a child has a diagnosis of Asperger’s Syndrome does not mean they will automatically qualify for a place in an Autism Classroom.

3.6 Other needs

Speech and language difficulties.
Hearing difficulties.

3.7 English as an Additional Language (EAL)

English as an Additional Language is described as a temporary difficulty with accessing the curriculum due to a language deficit. This deficit can and will, with intervention, improve over time.

NOTE: One other “Special Need” is Giftedness. Gifted students can also find secondary education extremely stressful or distressing and may struggle to fit in. Our school also endeavours to address the needs of particularly able students, using tactics such as differentiated teaching styles and individual support where deemed necessary.

4. The Special Educational Needs Team– People Involved

Ultimate responsibility for the education of children with individual needs in Swords Community rests with the Board of Management. The Board, and the Principal acting on its behalf, will work with the SEN team and all staff to monitor implementation of the SEN programme on an on-going basis to ensure best practice, will promote a whole-school approach to special educational provision and will also appoint various staff to operate the programme.

This staff team will include a number of people as described below.

4.1 Principal

The Principal has overall responsibility for the development and implementation of the school’s policies on Special Needs and Learning Support. He/she will sanction exemption from certain subjects as requested, ensure adequate timetabling of hours for learning support, resource and language support as well as facilitating meetings of, and in-service training for, the SEN team staff.

4.2 Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO)

The Special Educational Needs Coordinator will have overall responsibility for management of the daily operations of the SEN team.

Tasks such as record keeping, report writing, timetabling of additional support, identifying students with SEN, making applications for reasonable accommodations in exams, management of SNAs and liaison with external agencies are among some duties of the SENCO.

These duties are reviewed regularly and may change to ensure the priorities of the SEN team are addressed.

4.3 Special Education Teachers

A team of staff will teach individual and small groups of students requiring learning support. They will develop Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for these students. They will offer advice to subject teachers and other departments on employing differentiated teaching methods and resources in their subject teaching. They will liaise with external agencies if requested to do so by management or the SENCO. Where there are large numbers of students with SEN, administrative duties are assigned to some SEN teachers.

These duties are reviewed regularly and may change to ensure the priorities of the SEN team are addressed.

4.4 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)

Depending on an allocation being granted by the Department of Education and Youth, a small team of staff will cater for the care needs and particular difficulties of some students. They will provide assistance as required which could be in the area of student organisation, extra-curricular activities, helping teachers in the supervision of students with SEN, or helping students to become more independent and self-reliant. SNAs should be involved in training and attend meetings relevant to their role. They will also carry out duties as assigned by the Principal/ Deputy Principal and SENCO in accordance with the school's SNA Policy which should be read in conjunction with this policy.

4.5 Class Teachers

The class teacher has a key role in bringing about the successful inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream classes. The class teacher has primary responsibility for the educational progress of all students in his/her class. It is particularly important that all class teachers create a classroom environment that accommodates and takes account of learning and physical difficulties. Whether students are taught in mixed ability or streamed classes, it is expected that teachers will implement differentiated approaches to teaching, learning and assessment to ensure that the skills of all students, including students with SEN, are developed.

Class teachers will make themselves aware of the special educational needs of students in their classes. Attainment levels in literacy and numeracy plus a mini profile of all pupils with a psychological assessment is made available to all teachers at the first staff meeting of the new school year and is available through the Co-ordinator on request. Teachers take steps to inform themselves of the special needs of any student in their classes and to bring any concerns regarding such a student to the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator.

The class teacher also plays an important role in the early identification of students with SEN. The class teacher is alert to the possibility of general and specific learning difficulties and brings their concerns to the attention of the SEN team. A key element of successful provision for students with SEN is a high level of consultation and co-operation between the class teacher and the SEN team. A class teacher, Tutor or Year Head can refer any student they are concerned about to the SEN Co-ordinator through the SEN Referral Form. This first step in the screening process allows the SEN team to identify the nature of SEN being experienced. It is during this time that the learning, emotional, behavioural and social needs of the student are evaluated. The Co-ordinator will gather all the relevant information and consult with school management, the parents and the student. Learning supports will then be put in place in line with the new model of allocation. Where it is agreed that SNA support is required, an application will be made to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).

The academic progress of students throughout the school rests in the first instance with the mainstream class teacher. In order to ensure that as a school we meet the needs of all our special educational needs students, all teachers are encouraged to:

- Be aware of the school's policy and procedures for dealing with students with special educational needs.
- Seek advice from the SEN Co-ordinator and/or team member regarding students with special educational needs.
- Take responsibility for their own continuous professional development particularly with regard to common difficulties e.g. Dyslexia
- Develop an attitude of ownership to the education of students in their classes with Special Educational Needs
- Plan how to most effectively engage the SNA, where relevant, in consultation with the SEN Co-ordinator
- Support/encourage independence in the student; this is particularly important for Senior Cycle students.

4.6 Student Support Team – Core Team

Teachers involved in the Student Support Team will participate in the SEN programme in the School, working with the SEN Team on an on-going basis to provide supports and services to the relevant students. This will include, but is not limited to:

- Career Guidance Counsellor
- Behaviour for Learning Teacher

Their role is to:

- Support the SEN team.
- Attend SEN meetings as agreed with the SENCO
- Advise the team, if and when necessary

- Assist with testing
- Communicate with parents.

4.7 Parents

Where the word “parent” is used, it is understood to refer also to “guardian” if appropriate. The effectiveness of any assessment or intervention will be crucially influenced by the involvement of the student’s parents.

At the Induction Day/Evening, information on SEN provision in the school is provided to parents. Throughout the year further updates and details will be communicated to parents. In return, parents are expected to keep the SENCO or relevant teachers updated with developments from their perspective. They are also expected to work closely with the SEN staff to make their child’s learning experience as positive as possible.

Parents are invited to contact the SEN Team during the year and are invited to complete a feedback form to allow for planning. Parents are always contacted if a student is to be referred for assessment and afterwards to discuss the outcome of the assessment, the development of a Student Support File (SSF) and the review of the Student Support Plan (SSP). Parents are expected to support the work of the school with the student and to ensure the correct use and maintenance of any aids or equipment that are provided for the student.

4.8 Students

Students have a critical role to play in the development and evaluation of their own learning.

They can become:

- More independent as learners and enabled to take more responsibility for their own learning
- Successful as learners and better able to develop skills and strategies to maximise their own learning
- More aware of different teaching and learning styles
- Part of the development of their own SSP and learning targets and outcomes
- More aware of working co-operatively with others and of taking a team approach to enquiry and to responses to tasks.

5. Identifying Students with Individual Needs and Learning Differences

5.1 Access to Learning Support

As of March 2017, there is a new model of allocating teaching resources to students. Individual students are no longer granted specific hours from the NCSE based on their diagnosis. From September 2017 schools will have the autonomy to allocate teaching resources based on the level of a student's need, rather than on the basis of diagnosis.

Decisions on the support offered to students will be made based on a number of criteria. These include, but are not limited to:

- Information gathered from psychological assessment (where the student has one)
- Information gathered from parents
- Information gathered from primary school
- Teacher referrals
- Formal and informal school assessment
- Observation by teachers
- Students registered for support through the Autism Class
- Communication with outside agencies
- Student self-referral.

A student profile or plan is then developed to support the student. This plan will be monitored and reviewed and student progress will be recorded.

5.2 Methods of Identifying Students with Individual Needs and Learning Differences

Pre-enrolment:

- The SENCO and/or Yearhead will contact feeder schools to identify possible students with individual needs and learning differences.
- The SENCO and/or the SEN Team will make contact with parents. All relevant documentation in relation to the student with SEN should be passed on to the School, in accordance with the Admissions Policy and in order to ensure that adequate resources can be accessed for that student when they arrive.
- Any documentation in relation to a student with SEN will be referred to the Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO), who will decide what resources should be made available e.g. allocation of resource hours, SNA allocation, specialized equipment, etc.
- It is to be understood that the ability of the school to respond to the educational needs of any student applying for admission is dependent on the Department of Education and Youth supplying the appropriate facilities and resources to allow the school to answer that need. It may therefore be necessary for the Board of Management to defer enrolment of a student, pending provision of appropriate resources by the DES to meet the needs of that student.

Screening of First Year students:

- All 1st Years are screened using standardised screening tests in literacy and numeracy/CAT 4
- Students who are achieving below the 10th percentile in literacy and numeracy may be selected for further diagnostic assessments
- If considered appropriate, these students' parents will be offered the opportunity for their child to avail of the appropriate support
- Further referrals may be made to outside agencies e.g. the NCSE, PSS, HSE where it is deemed appropriate by the SENCO or Principal, in consultation with parents and the SENO.

Students with SEN who transfer from another post-primary school:

Any student with SEN who transfers from another post-primary school will provide the necessary assessment reports in line with 1st year testing and will have the appropriate resources made available to them.

5.3 On-going assessment of students

- From time to time, it can emerge that a student who was not previously identified as having individual needs and learning differences is experiencing barriers to learning. For students who continue to cause concern, referral to the SEN team may be appropriate.
- If the SEN team decides that a student would benefit from further intervention, they will assess the student informally. Parents are informed and their consent is sought prior to any assessment taking place. The outcome of this assessment will determine what course of action is taken.
- The results of the assessment may indicate that a student does not have a learning difficulty. In this case the student's needs are supported through the structures available to all students, such as mentoring/monitoring by Year Head, support from the Guidance Counsellor, review of entry levels for State Examinations.
- If the results of the assessment indicate that a student has a learning difficulty a decision may be made to refer the student for a formal Psychological Assessment e.g. to PSS , or to allocate that student support hours.
- In its operations, the School shall be guided by the new model of allocation and the National Education Psychological Services (NEPS) guidelines for establishing a continuum of assessment and support.

6. Allocation of Resources and Teaching of Students with SEN

Resources in school will be directed towards the students in greatest need and in accordance with the model of allocation for resource hours.

The SEN team will interpret the outcome of assessments and consider the most appropriate form of intervention for the student, in consultation with parents, subject teachers, SNAs and relevant outside agencies.

Swords Community College aspires to educate students with Special Educational Needs in an inclusive setting within the class group, supported by an SNA, where appropriate. This may take the form of team-teaching in particular subjects. It may also take the form of small classes for students who are struggling with a particular subject.

If withdrawal of students with SEN from mainstream classes for supplementary or resource teaching is deemed necessary, parents' permission will be sought. Students may be timetabled with a subject teacher for Learning Support, if the SENCO or Principal deems it appropriate. The timetabling of such classes is reviewed on a regular basis by the SENCO. Additional Support classes are rotated termly to ensure that students are not withdrawn from the same subject in any given year.

7. Models of Provision of Learning Support

We aspire to provide a model of responsible inclusion that best meets the needs of the individual student. In line with the new model of allocation, support for achieving learning outcomes or intentions in the mainstream class group is the preferred method of provision.

- Individual classes are used only where a student requires specialised individual support.
- Small group classes is the preferred method of provision with most students in resource and learning support getting their allocation in small groups. The organisation of these groupings is the responsibility of the SENCO. Groups are arranged on the basis of similar need profiles and the capacity to withdraw students at the same time. Withdrawal for small groups usually occurs during Irish for those students who are exempt.
- Small group classes are used where groups of students are given Numeracy and Literacy, social skills and organisation support.
- An alternative timetable may be arranged for a small number of students for whom it is deemed necessary, after consultation with the psychologist, parents and teachers. These students have their timetable reduced because they cannot sustain a full curriculum. In so far as it is possible, extra learning support or additional classes in remaining subjects are provided at the time of the dropped subjects (i.e. Resource Centre). This alternative timetable can be L2LPs, Short Courses, Skills for Life or other programmes tailored to meet the needs of the student. In some instances, students may simply need restorative time in their timetable to support them accessing their other subjects.

- Placement in the Autism Class is based on a recommendation in the student's psychological report and there being availability in the class (see Autism Class Admissions Policy for detailed information). Students assigned to the Autism Class are registered in the class of their mainstream peers.

8. Approaches to Learning in the Classroom

The teaching staff will provide a variety of experiences/activities during a course of study and during a lesson if possible. Teachers will try to identify the learning style of the individual and use suitable methodologies to appeal to the kinaesthetic, auditory, sensory, linguistic, visual and interpersonal intelligences. There are opportunities for individual and group activities.

Lessons are conducted in a secure, supportive and disciplined manner. The students and the staff interact in a manner that demonstrates mutual respect. Our school believes that learning takes place most effectively in the context of a caring relationship and that good teacher/student relationships foster trust and promote self-reliance and initiative in the student.

Some of the programmes offered include:

- Level One Learning Programme
- Level Two Learning Programme
- Social Skills
- Independence Programmes
- Behaviour Support
- Restorative Time.

9. Administrative Issues in the SEN Team

9.1 Reasonable Accommodations

The SEN team will liaise with the State Examinations Commission (SEC) to secure and facilitate reasonable accommodations for eligible students with individual needs and learning differences during State Examinations. Application dates and guidelines are given to school each academic year by the SEC. Parental permission is always sought at this stage. In house testing is conducted and an application is made to the SEC. It is the SEC who grants the accommodations and has the final say on these.

Students with individual needs and learning differences sit house exams in accordance with Swords Community College procedures. Within resource constraints, students who have been awarded special arrangements for State Examinations will have the benefit of the same in Swords Community College exams.

9.2 Equipment

The SEN team will liaise with the Department of Education and Youth and the NCSE to secure and facilitate personal equipment (such as laptop computers, mobile devices, notebooks, voice recognition software) for eligible students with individual needs and learning differences.

10. Data Management and Privacy

The SEN team abides by the following protocols in relation to data management and privacy:

- One page information sheet on VS Ware
- Confidentiality Policy
- SEN iCloud which is password protected
- Use of school emails only in which students' are identified by initials alone.

11. Homework Procedures

Where SEN homework is given, the same procedures apply as per any other homework. Special emphasis is placed on positive feedback. SEN work is also recorded in the student's journal, and the journal may be frequently used to facilitate communication with parents.

12. Links with Outside Agencies and Services

Swords Community College has fostered and maintained positive links with a significant number of outside agencies. These include:

- National Council for Special Education (NCSE)
- Special Education Support Service (SESS)
- State Examinations Commission (SEC)
- National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB)
- Beechpark
- Middletown Centre for Autism
- Psychological Support Service (PSS)
- HSE Social Work Department
- Lucena Clinic services to include:
 - Clinical psychologists
 - Occupational therapists
 - Speech and language therapists.

(School may wish to add their own links to this list).

This list is not exhaustive and the school will develop further links with outside agencies as the needs of the students dictate.

It may be necessary to hold case conferences with relevant professional experts with the permission and knowledge of the student's parents (and often their attendance) in order to determine the best approach and provision for that student.

13. PSS Assessments

In the likely event of excessive demand for PSS psychological assessments, a waiting list system shall apply. Each school is allocated a limited number of assessments per year and priority is based on the needs of the student. Places on this list shall be prioritised according to need, as determined by the Principal and the SENCO.

14. Access to SNAs

A new model of frontloading SNA will come into place for the 22/23 school year. This allocation is granted by the NCSE. The SENO will make recommendations to the NCSE based on the needs within the school. The number of students in receipt of access to SNA support is greater than the number of SNAs allocated to the school. Therefore the SEN Team must assign SNA support based on need and students will be in some classes without SNA support. Priority is given to students with the most needs. Where there is SNA access, it is the role of the SNA to support teaching and learning in a discrete manner, to promote the independence of the student, and to assist any other students who may require support when not assisting the student with access.

15. Transport

Applications for transport are made through the NCSE. If successful the students are granted individual or shared transport. The school is not responsible for the selection or supervision of drivers. Please refer to the Transport guidelines for details.

16. Code of Behaviour

All students in Swords Community College are expected to adhere to the school's Code of Behaviour. However, it is accepted that, for some students, extra layers of support/interventions will be needed before implementing sanctions according to the Code of Behaviour. This support process is outlined in the school's Promoting Positive Behaviour Guidelines. This does not remove sanctions but adjusts the sanctions to meet the individual situation. It is accepted that if a ladder of supports does not change the student's behaviour the Code of Discipline will be acted upon.