St. Mary's College Junior School

Special Education Needs Policy

Introduction

St. Mary's College Junior School, under the patronage of the Spiritan Education Trust, is an independent junior school catering for a cross-section of children. The purpose of this Special Education Needs (SEN) policy is to provide practical guidance for teachers, parents, and other interested parties on the provision of effective learning support to students experiencing low achievement and/or learning difficulties, including those who are ahead of their peers. This policy fulfils our obligations under the Education Act 1998.

The school's learning programmes are grounded in the Department of Education's Continuum of Support framework.

The Principal Aim of Learning Support is to:

- Promote inclusion of, and provide support to, students identified with special education and additional needs by offering appropriate forms of education provision and the most efficient use of available resources.
- Identify students with special education needs as early as possible using a variety of means and in consultation with appropriate personnel.
- Optimise the teaching and learning process so as to enable students with learning difficulties to achieve adequate levels of proficiency in literacy and numeracy before leaving primary school.

Specific Objectives of Learning Support

Through the implementation of this policy we strive to:

- Facilitate students to participate in the areas of literacy and numeracy for their class level
- Develop positive self-esteem and positive attitudes to school and learning
- Enable students to monitor their own learning and become independent learners within their own ability
- Involve parents in supporting their child's learning
- Promote collaboration among teachers

Guiding Principles

The school recognises that effective learning programmes are based on the following principles:

- Effective whole-school policies
- Whole-school involvement
- Assessment and intervention
- Direction of resources towards students in greatest need in lower classes
- Learning support prioritised for students identified by an Educational Psychologist as having a specific learning difficulty

Intervention Strategies

- The development and implementation of agreed whole-school approaches to literacy and numeracy
- Implementation of a guided reading programme throughout the school
- Class-based early intervention by the learning support teachers resulting in the provision of additional individual/group support
- Ongoing observation and assessment of students by the class teacher.

Selection of Students for Learning Support

Students identified by an Educational Psychologist as having a specific learning difficulty are prioritised for learning support. The principle of early intervention applies; therefore, students from younger classes are given priority when hours are being allocated.

All students throughout the school are screened annually, using appropriate standardised tests as well as other screening tests.

In the case of students performing at or below the 10th percentile (or equivalent standard score/sTen indicating significant difficulty), the screening process is followed by a consultative meeting between the class teacher, the learning support teachers, the Principal, and the parents concerning the student's performance.

In the allocation of places for learning support, the following are prioritised:

- Students identified by an Educational Psychologist as having a specific learning difficulty and are at or below the 10th percentile in literacy and/or numeracy.

We aim to ensure that students in 5th and 6th are working towards independent learning as they prepare for secondary school. If the timetable allows, students from 5th and 6th classes will receive support.

Professional judgement may override strict percentile cut-offs in cases of complex need or significant discrepancy between ability and attainment.

Provision of Supplementary Teaching

- The primary work of the learning support teachers is the provision of supplementary teaching to the students identified above
- One-to-one teaching may be provided where small group teaching has not been effective
- A system of withdrawal and/or in-class support will operate in response to the needs of the individual student. Withdrawal is kept to the minimum necessary; in-class support is preferred where feasible
- The class teacher and the learning support teachers will meet to devise a Student Support File (SSF) derived from the Continuum of Support in consultation with the Principal and parents. If the student is in receipt of support from a Resource Teacher to address other needs, e.g., behavioural problems, sensory difficulty, it may be appropriate for the student to avail of a physical exercise/movement programme as time and resources allow

Student Support Files

Student Support Files (SSFs) will be created for those who have been assessed for a specific learning difficulty and are receiving learning support. SSFs include baseline data, SMART targets, interventions, review dates, and parent/child input, and are stored securely in line with GDPR.

A detailed review will take place, as and when required. The learning support teachers, the class teacher, and Principal will reallocate hours to ensure all students are catered for equally.

Timetabling

- The provision of learning support is in addition to the regular class teaching in English and Mathematics
- Effort is made to ensure that students do not miss out on the same area of the curriculum each time they attend learning support
- The provision of learning support may include withdrawal of students from their classroom and/or in-class tuition
- In-class support, if appropriate, will be jointly designed and monitored by the class teacher and the learning support teachers

Continuing/Discontinuing Learning Support Teaching

Learning support teaching may be discontinued in the following circumstances:

- On assessment, the student scores a sTen of 3 or above in the standardised assessments
- Learning targets are being met
- It is considered to be in the student's best interest

Following the end of the review as detailed above, a decision is made to continue/discontinue the provision of learning support. The decision-making process involves consultation between the class teacher, the learning support teachers, and the Principal and account is also

taken of the overall learning support demands in the school. Parents/Guardians will be made aware of any changes made and reasons given.

Where appropriate, a graduated exit plan (e.g., reduced frequency with monitoring) will be implemented to sustain progress.

While recommendations from assessments carried out by Educational Psychologists are taken into consideration when allocating resource time, it is the responsibility of the class teacher, the Learning Support team, and the Principal to deem whether these recommendations are appropriate to meet the specific needs of each student.

The criteria on which the decision will be made include:

- Fairness to all
- A consideration as to whether the student has achieved some/all of the learning targets set
- A consideration as to whether the student will be able to cope independently/semi-independently in the classroom learning context
- A decision to continue the provision of learning support teaching will result in a revision of the student's SSF

Referral to External Assessment Services

- The Principal and/or learning support teachers and/or class teacher meet with the parents/guardians to discuss the need for the referral and to seek written consent.
- Learning support teachers coordinate the referral of a student to external assessment services where applicable
- The class teacher completes the necessary referral form in consultation with the appropriate school personnel
- In some cases, the external professional visits the school to meet with the student, parents/guardians, Principal, class teacher, and the learning support teachers as appropriate, and the assessment is conducted. Assessments are usually conducted off-site
- This is followed by a return visit at which findings are discussed, recommendations are considered, and an appropriate response plan is agreed

Staff Roles and Responsibilities

Learning support is a collaborative responsibility shared by all partners in the learning experiences. It is important that all partners (The Board, Principal, learning support teachers, Teacher, Parents/Guardians, and Child) contribute to the planning and implementation of our school plan on learning support.

Board of Management

The role of the Board of Management is to:

- Monitor the development and implementation of the school's policy on learning support

- Oversee the development, implementation and review of the provision of learning support in the school
- Ensure adequate classroom accommodation and teaching resources are provided for the learning support teachers
- Provide a secure facility for storage of records in relation to students in receipt of learning support (in line with GDPR)
- Budget for ongoing support for continuing professional development in learning support for staff

Principal

The role of the Principal is to:

- Assume overall responsibility for the development and implementation of the school's policy on learning support in cooperation with the Board of Management, teachers, parents/guardians, and students
- Work with teachers and parents/guardians in the development of the school plan on learning support
- Monitor the implementation of the school plan on learning support on an ongoing basis
- Monitor the selection of students for supplementary teaching, ensuring that this service is focused on the students with identified specific learning difficulties and those with lowest levels of achievement
- Assume responsibility for coordinating learning support in the context of Special Education Needs Services
- Oversee the implementation of a whole-school assessment and screening programme to identify students with low achievement and learning difficulties so that these students can be provided with the support they need
- Keep teachers informed about the external assessment services that are available and the procedure to be followed in initiating referrals, which will be done by the learning support teachers
- Help teachers increase their knowledge in the area of learning support and provide professional development opportunities

Class Teacher

The class teacher has primary responsibility for the progress of all students in his/her class, including those selected for supplementary teaching. In supporting the development and implementation of the school plan on learning support, the class teacher should:

- Implement teaching programmes which optimise the learning of all students and, to the greatest extent possible, prevent the emergence of learning difficulties
- Implement the school policies on screening and selecting students for supplementary teaching in English and Maths by cooperating and assisting with the administration and scoring of appropriate screening measures
- For each student who is in receipt of supplementary teaching, collaborate with the learning support teachers in the development of an SSF and learning programme by identifying appropriate learning targets and by organising classroom activities to achieve these targets

- Fortnightly/weekly plans of work for English and Maths to be uploaded to the school server to be accessed by the learning support teachers in advance

With regard to teaching students with low achievement, the following general approaches and methods are recommended:

- Such students should be prioritised when accessing information from the previous class teacher
- Priority when establishing parental contact
- Group teaching
- Modify presentation and questioning techniques to maximise the involvement of students with low achievement in class activities
- Placing emphasis on oral language development across the curriculum.
- Setting learning targets at an appropriate level
- Providing learning activities and material which are suitably challenging but which also ensure success and progress
- Carrying out error analyses of a student's work to pinpoint specific areas of difficulty.
- Setting up 'buddy systems' in class (high achievers collaboratively working with low achievers, e.g., peer tutoring/paired reading)
- Applying assessments and tests which offer challenge and opportunities for success to students of all levels of achievement

A key role of successful learning support is a very high level of consultation and cooperation between the class teacher and the learning support teachers. Central to this consultation is the development, implementation, and review of Student Support Files.

Learning Support Teacher(s)

The role of the learning support teacher is to:

- Work alongside the class teacher, parents, and student to develop a Student Support Plan for each student who is selected for supplementary teaching in consultation with the class teacher and parents/guardians
- Maintain a plan and record progress for each individual/group of students in receipt of learning support
- Provide teaching in English and Mathematics to students in the school who experience low achievement, in accordance with the school's selection criteria
- Contribute to the development of policy on learning support at whole-school level
- Provide advice to the class teachers in such areas as individual student assessment and programme planning, as well as approaches to language development, reading, writing, and mathematics for students experiencing difficulties
- Contribute at school level to decision-making regarding the purchase of learning resource books and materials to be made available to students with learning difficulties in their mainstream classrooms and in the learning support rooms
- Perform a defined role in coordinating the provision of learning support services in the school
- Liaise with external assessment services to arrange assessments and special provision for students with specific learning difficulties
- Maintain a list of students who are receiving supplementary teaching and special education support

- Oversee the administration, correction, and recording of annual standardised tests
- Monitor the progress of students who have discontinued learning support

Parents/Guardians

Parents contribute to the initial diagnostic assessment by sharing insights into their child's development and learning difficulties, by discussing the outcomes of the assessment, and by contributing to the selection of learning targets and associated activities based on the child's needs. Where a child is in receipt of support teaching from a learning support teacher, the parents/guardians:

- Participate in the development of the child's SSF
- Discuss their child's progress with the classroom teacher and learning support teachers, and in cases where support teaching is to be continued, discuss the revised learning targets, activities in their child's SSP, and date of review
- Implement suggested home-based activities outlined in the child's SSF

Communication Strategies

The operation of an effective communication system between all parties involved in meeting the learning needs of the student is considered essential. The various strands of the system include:

- Class teacher and the learning support teachers following a low score on a screening test
- Principal and/or learning support teachers and/or class teacher and parents/guardians following a low score on a screening test, including the seeking of approval for further diagnostic assessment and/or provision of supplementary teaching
- Regular communication between the learning support teachers and the class teacher, through the weekly completion of the class plans in English and Mathematics and the participation in formal and informal meetings
- Regular communication between the learning support teachers and parents/guardians

Success Criteria

The school-wide implementation of this policy will result in enhancement of students' learning in the following ways:

- Improved standards of academic achievement with the student's individual learning programme
- Enabling the discontinuation of the provision of learning support based on positive assessment results
- Enhanced parental involvement in supporting their child's learning needs
- Increased opportunities for effective communication between school personnel in relation to the student's progress

Students with specific learning/coordination problems (e.g., dyspraxia) will benefit from individual and group sessions with our P.E. teacher as and when the timetable allows.

Occupational therapy can help students with motor skill and sensory difficulties. Perceptual motor training is a set of exercises that some therapists use and recommend.

Enrolment of children with a disability and/or special education need

Application for all students, including children with a disability and/or other special education needs, is governed at all times by the school's current Enrolment Policy. However, the attention of parents/guardians of students with a disability and/or other special education needs is also drawn to the following points:

- St. Mary's College Junior School is an independent mainstream school and has higher student/teacher ratios than those that apply in 'Special' schools
- The teachers in our school are trained and qualified to teach in mainstream education. In general, they do not have specific special education needs teacher training, experience, or qualifications
- While students with specific learning difficulties can be integrated into a mainstream class and may be supported by a Special Needs Assistant and resource teaching, this is not the same as the intensive one-to-one teaching he/she would avail of in a special school
- A mainstream school does not have ancillary services enjoyed by special schools, such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, and physiotherapy
- The school does not currently have facilities specially adapted for students with physical disability, although the school is fully committed to the provision of these, should any student need same, subject to funding. The school will pursue reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities within available resources, in line with the Education Act 1998 and Equal Status legislation
- A child with specific learning difficulties integrated into an ordinary mainstream class will, by the nature of such integration, experience the normal day-to-day happenings, determined by the reality of school life and the existing customs and practices. Every child in the school, including those with a disability and/or special educational needs, is bound by school policies both in existence and those developed from time to time by the Staff and Board of Management. The school cannot offer any additional tuition, support, and supervision beyond that which is offered to any other student in the school, at times other than when the school is in operation during the normal school year
- From year to year, the allocation of teachers to classes is focused on the needs of the whole school, and consequently the school cannot guarantee long-term continuity or predictability in personnel. Students will benefit from our resources as they allow. A close level of cooperation is required between parents/guardians, the class teacher, and any other school personnel assigned to support the student
- To enable us to provide the best services for the student and to access any additional support/s that may be available, we require parents/guardians to supply the school with copies of the most recent psychological and medical reports prior to enrolment. These will be treated in the utmost confidence at all times
- Copies of all relevant assessments and reports should be supplied to the school as these become available
- An assurance from parents that they understand that our responsibility as a school is primarily to all the students in our care and that therefore, if it becomes apparent to either/both the teachers and parents/guardians that the integration of an individual child with a disability and/or special educational needs is having an ongoing

detrimental effect on the education of the other students in the class or school, the Board of Management reserves the right to review the enrolment of the individual child

Enrolment of Overseas Students

- The school's Enrolment Policy governs enrolment of all students
- The enrolment procedure for non-national students is exactly the same as that for Irish students
- Overseas students are welcome to enrol in our school, provided there is a place in the appropriate class, in line with our enrolment policy
- Parents/guardians of overseas students will be afforded help in completion of enrolment documentation, should they require it
- Every effort will be made to create a warm and welcoming environment for overseas parents/guardians who approach the school to enrol their child/children
- Overseas students will be placed in an age-appropriate class as far as possible

Glossary of Screening and Diagnostic Tests used in our School

At present, the Drumcondra Reading, Mathematics, and Spelling tests are used for general testing in all classes.

Other tests include:

- New Group Reading Test (NGRT) – screening
- Dyslexia Screening Test – screening
- Neale Analysis of Reading Ability – diagnostic
- Non-Reading Intelligence Test (NRIT) – diagnostic
- Single Word Spelling Test – screening
- Belfield Infant Assessment Profile (BIAP) – screening/diagnostic (infants)
- Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST) – screening (infants)

Irish Exemptions

As St. Mary's College is an independent primary school, it is not recognised by the Department of Education and can therefore not grant exemptions from the study of Irish to children enrolled in our school.

If your son is currently in a recognised national school and meets the criteria for an Irish exemption:

- The current national school should issue the Certificate of Exemption
- You, as parent/guardian, are responsible for providing a copy of that certificate to the receiving school (St Mary’s College Junior School)

Code Review

This Special Education Needs Policy was reviewed on 22nd September 2026 and will be reviewed on a yearly basis (or sooner if deemed necessary).
Modifications to practice may be made from time to time outside of the formal review.