



# Learning Support Policy

## ***Introduction***

*This policy was formulated through a process of collaboration between the teaching staff of the school, an Bord Bainistíochta agus Coiste na dTuismitheoirí to provide information regarding Learning Support structures in Gaelscoil na gCeithre Maol. The policy was updated in 2020.*

## ***Rationale***

*This policy is intended to provide practical guidance to teachers, parents and other concerned persons on the provision of effective learning support to pupils experiencing or likely to experience learning difficulties. The policy will also fulfil our obligations under the Education Act 1998, Education and Welfare Act 2000 and Disability Bill 2002, Equal Status Act 2000, Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 (EPSEN) and reflects the content of DES Circulars 07/02, 08/02, 24/03, 02/05, 70/14 and 13/17.*

## ***Relationship to the School's Ethos***

*We aim to provide an excellent standard of education through the medium of Irish, steeped in an ethos that promotes Christian values and Irish heritage. We hope to inspire every child to achieve their full potential by giving them a positive experience of education and encouraging them to be independent, tolerant, kind and confident.*

*Our aim as a school community is to create a welcoming, cooperative, communicative atmosphere, in which we work together to give our students the best possible start in life.*

## ***Aims and Objectives***

*When this policy is fully implemented, we expect*

- 1. To enable children to perform and learn individually*
- 2. To develop positive self-esteem and positive attitudes about school and learning in pupils*
- 3. To enable pupils to monitor their own learning and become independent learners*
- 4. To involve parents in supporting their children's learning*
- 5. To promote collaboration among teachers in the implementation of whole school policies on learning support for pupils*
- 6. To establish early intervention programmes designed to enhance learning and to prevent difficulties in learning.*

## ***Learning Support Principles***

*Our Learning Support programme is based on the following principles*

- *Ethos of inclusion, well-being, high aspirational with clear goal setting for social and academic needs*
- *An enabling environment*
- *Staff knowledge, reflection and continued professional development*
- *Effective relationships and collaboration with parents, students, peers, professionals and school staff*
- *Effective whole school policies and parental involvement*
- *Individualised learning programmes through assessment of curriculum, social skills, emotional skills and behaviour*
- *Differentiation through a variety of strategies and approaches*
- *Provision of intensive early-intervention*
- *Direction of resources to pupils in greatest need*

### ***Registration***

*Parents are given forms to complete prior to their child enrolling in the school. The school stresses the importance of parents informing the school of any additional needs their child may have. If a pupil has an identified additional need and is already receiving a service from another organisation, it is the responsibility of the parents to notify the school. The Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO) is contacted at the earliest opportunity so as to apply for support/SNA assistance for the pupil if appropriate. Having gathered the relevant information, the Board of Management will ensure that a child with Special Educational Needs will be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have special needs unless the degree or nature of those needs is not in the best interests of the child and that it does not interrupt the effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated.*

### ***Selection***

*We aim to support as many pupils as possible through the Learning Support programme and equally we need to prioritise this support for the pupils in greatest need of support.*

*Children who require additional tuition from the special education teacher are identified from the sources*

*following:*

- *Information from the enrolment form*
- *Parental input;*
- *Teacher observation;*
- *Teacher-designed tests and tasks;*
- *Checklists;*
- *Standardized examinations;*
- *External reports.*

*The final decision on those pupils in receipt of learning support will rest with the Principal and the Learning Support teacher.*

*Learning Support pupils are identified and selected in the Infant classes based on the classroom teacher's observation, attainment checklists and classroom assessments.*

*Learning Support pupils are identified in First Class based on the Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST) results completed at the end of Senior Infants as well as classroom teacher's observations, attainment checklists and classroom assessments.*

*Learning Support pupils are identified in Second Class upwards based on pupils scoring below the 20<sup>th</sup> percentile in their annual Drumcondra assessments in Gaelige, English and Mata. Pupils with higher scores than the set 20<sup>th</sup> percentile range may be selected for support should concerns arise and the availability exists in the Learning Support Programme.*

*The pupils selected for inclusion in the Learning Support programme are reviewed regularly.*

### **Meetings & Reports**

The Learning Support team (IT teachers and Principal) will meet regularly to discuss issues and progress.

The Learning Support teacher will meet with the class teacher and the SNA as needed to regularly review the IEP plans and goals achieved by the children.

We hold parent meetings for the beginning of November each year. Parents of children with additional needs will have more regular meetings if appropriate during the school year to discuss updating and the children's progress.

### **Responsibility**

The support given to students with special educational needs is a collaborative responsibility. This includes the Board of Management, SENO, Principal, class teacher, special education teachers, parents, assistants special needs, visiting teachers, home / school liaison officers

### **Board of Management:**

The Board will fulfil its legal obligations in relation to students with special educational. Board of Management members should be familiar with the school's SEN provision.

### **Principal:**

The role of the principal is to:

- Take responsibility for developing and implementing school policy in relation to special educational needs in conjunction with the Board of Management, teachers, with parents and students;
- Liaise and work closely with the special education teachers and special needs assistants
- Consult and liaise with the SENO when needed with regard to the provision of support, staff and facilities.
- Monitor the implementation of the special needs policy in the school.

### **Role of the Classroom Teacher**

*The class teacher has primary responsibility for the progress of all pupils in his/her class, including those selected for support teaching. A particular responsibility of the class teacher is to create a classroom environment that promotes differentiation and a*

variety of teaching methodologies and strategies to fully support children in need of additional support. This is best achieved by grouping pupils for instruction, providing lower achieving pupils with strategies for reading and problem solving, adapting learning materials for pupils who are low-achieving and liaising closely with their parents. Where a pupil requires more than differentiation at class level, it is essential that the class teacher should contribute to developing the learning targets in the pupil's Support Plan and to the planning and implementation of activities designed to attain those targets. Where support teaching cannot be provided for a pupil, or is being discontinued, the class teacher will need to develop and implement a support programme that meets the pupil's changing needs.

The classroom teacher must differentiate classroom work and homework for children with learning difficulties. More detailed information on roles and responsibilities in Appendix A.

### **The Role of Parents**

Parental support and the sharing of information is central to an effective Learning Support programme. Regular meetings are scheduled with parents whose children are benefitting from the Learning Support programme to discuss progress and targets set for their child. The school will aid and advise parents on how best to help their child at home. Children can only be withdrawn from the classroom with parental consent on a specific school consent form available in Appendix B.

**Special Needs Assistants (SNA)** may be appointed to the school to support a child. The parents' permission is sought before an application is made to the SENO for an SNA. The SNA works under the direction and supervision of the class teacher in order to promote effective learning and teaching. The Principal has the sole responsibility of allocating SNA support throughout the school. The allocation will be reviewed every two years through the NCSE front-loading model of allocations.

### **Implementation: NEPS Continuum of Support Approach**

The continuum of support described in these guidelines encompasses a graduated problem solving model of assessment and intervention in schools comprised of three distinct school based processes which are summarized below:

**Classroom Support** (Step 1) is an intervention process coordinated by the class teacher and carried out within the regular classroom.

**School Support** (Step 2) is an assessment and intervention process which is usually coordinated by the learning support / resource teacher working alongside the class teacher. Interventions at this stage will be additional to those provided through classroom support.

**School Support Plus** (Step 3) is generally characterised by the school requesting the involvement of relevant external services in more detailed assessment and development of intervention programmes. This level of intervention is for children with complex and/or

*enduring needs and whose progress is considered inadequate despite carefully planned interventions at the previous levels.*

*The model of assessment and intervention outlined here is underpinned by the recognition that special educational needs occur along a continuum from mild to severe and from transient to long term.*

*These guidelines are intended to compliment the Learning Support Guidelines (2000) and the Staged Approach to Assessment and Intervention outlined in Special Education Circular 02/05. They may be used in conjunction with the Guidelines on the Individual Education Plan Process (NCSE, 2006).*

### **Step 1: CLASSROOM SUPPORT**

*Classroom Support: An intervention process co-ordinated by the class teacher and carried out within the classroom to overcome varying difficulties.*

*Classroom Support is the most common, and typically the first response to emerging needs. It is a response for pupils who have distinct or individual educational needs and who require approaches to learning and/or behaviour which are additional to or different from those required by other pupils in their class. This could also range from pupils with very high abilities that require work differentiated to meet their needs.*

*Problem solving at this level typically begins when a parent or teacher has concerns about an individual pupil. The teacher and parents discuss the nature of the problem and consider strategies which may be effective.*

*Classroom Support incorporates the simple, informal problem-solving approaches commonly used by class teachers to support emerging needs e.g.*

- *Teachers plan, implement and review classroom rules, incentives and consequences to meet the needs of all pupils, paying particular attention to those who may be inattentive, impulsive and disruptive.*
- *Teachers also place their classroom within the wider context of the pupils' lives. For example, they consider if a pupil's basic needs such as food, warmth, shelter, safety and security are adequate.*
- *Teachers reflect on the classroom learning environment and consider how physical conditions, relationships, classroom discipline, teaching and learning can sustain difficult behaviour.*
- *The dedicated time for SPHE provides a valuable means for building positive relationships, developing positive behaviour and for addressing particular needs observed in the class group through topics such as 'I am unique'; feelings; decision making; belonging; identity and self esteem; or through social skills training which can focus on many of the skills that pupils need for success in school.*

*In some situations, when all of the above has been considered and interventions are put in place, they may be sufficient to meet the needs of pupils with certain difficulties.*

*However, for a small minority, a decision may be made to initiate a Classroom Support Plan. A template and directions on how to complete the classroom support plan are available in the Continuum of Support (Appendix B).*

*After a specific period of time, the Classroom Support Plan is reviewed and a decision is made based on the progress to date. It may be decided that the pupil has reached the set objectives or that the pupil would benefit from further classroom support planning or perhaps that the pupil should progress onto Step 2: School Support.*

*Step 2 - School Support involves a more intensive problem solving process, building on information gathered and interventions carried out under Classroom Support.*

*While*

*The class teacher retains overall responsibility for the pupil's learning, the learning support / resource teachers will be involved at this stage. The co-ordinating role may be taken by the class teacher, where appropriate, or by one of the supporting teachers. He/she will generally take the lead in problem solving and in coordinating further assessment, intervention and review in consultation with the pupil, other staff and parents. Pupils generally at this level of intervention are:*

- *Pupils functioning at or below STen 3 (15<sup>th</sup> percentile) in standardised tests (English, Irish or Math)*
- *Early intervention in Infants or 1<sup>st</sup> class based on the recommendation of the class teacher and supported by class based assessments and attainment checklists.*
- *Pupils in 1<sup>st</sup> class that scored poorly in their MIST assessment.*
- *Pupils in need of emotional or social support to help overcome stressful/tragic events in their lives*

*Following information gathering and assessment, the teacher, will meet the pupils' parents. A School Support Plan will be drawn up which will set out the nature of the pupils' learning difficulties, define specific teaching, learning and behavioural targets and set a timescale for review. The plan should for the most part be implemented within the normal classroom setting and complimented by focused school based intervention programmes. The child may equally be withdrawn from the classroom at this stage of intervention. Home based actions may also be included.*

*Once the plan devised at School Support level is fully implemented and due for review, the Learning Support team will decide on one of the three following options.*

- *The intervention was successful and the child may return to Step 1, Classroom Support*
- *The intervention is somewhat successful and the child needs another period of time at Step 2 with readjusted targets and interventions*
- *The child is not reaching the targets set at Step 2 and it is decided that the child should progress onto School Support Plus (Step 3)*

### ***Step 3 - School Support Plus***

*The School Support Plus process will generally involve external professionals and support services in a more detailed problem solving process to help the pupil. School support plus applies to those pupils whose needs are enduring and/or severe and complex and whose progress is considered inadequate despite carefully planned and reviewed interventions detailed in Classroom Support and/ or School Support plans.*

*The information from Classroom Support and School Support work will provide the starting point for problem-solving at this level. A review of the work already done at classroom support and school support will provide important information for a pupil's IEP.*

*Following the gathering of information, the co-ordinating teacher may, with parental consent, request the involvement of appropriate external professionals (e.g. Visiting Teachers, Educational Psychologists, Clinical Psychologists, Psychiatrists, Occupational Therapists, or Speech and Language Therapists).*

*Our NEPS school psychologist is Caitriona Whelan and our SENO is John Culhane.*

*The following pupils are generally on the School Support Plus stage.*

- *Pupils with complex needs*
- *Pupils who have had an assessment with an external professional.*

### ***High-Achieving Pupils***

*We recognise the importance of supporting and challenging pupils with very high abilities in the school. Every effort will be made to meet their needs which can be supported by the Learning Support teacher (should the time allow) once the needs of those pupils in greatest need is met. We use standardised test results to allocate this provision to particular pupils. We recommend the Centre of Talented Youth in DCU to parents.*

### **Deployment of Staff**

The Board of Management and the principal ensure the most effective deployment of staff in meeting the overall SEN requirements of the school, taking into account the experience/expertise, of teachers, part-time teachers, newly qualified teachers and SNAs.

The duties assigned to SNAs are in line with Circular 07/02. *'Special Needs Assistants have a central role in assisting the care of pupils with disabilities'*

### **Collaboration & Communication**

Meetings between principal, parents, class teacher, Special Education Teacher(s), SENO, psychologist and HSE personnel will be organised frequently to facilitate collaboration between those involved in the child's education.

If it is necessary to make specific arrangements for formal consultations, meetings will be arranged and specific time set aside. If a class teacher is involved, the class will be split into other classes or where possible, another teacher will supervise the class.

### **Resources**

The principal, class teachers and learning support/resource staff are responsible for sourcing and acquiring additional resources. The resources are stored in the learning support rooms and in the classrooms, if necessary. Every teacher has access to these resources.

### **Transfer to Post-Primary**

Specific education plan is prepared to cover the transition period from primary to post-primary. The class teacher/LST teacher is responsible for transferring information between the two schools, with the consent of the parents.

The SENO is responsible for ensuring that resources are on offer to those who need them. Information about the child's specific learning needs are transferred through meetings and written assessments at the end of the year. Parental consent is sought when information is transferred.

### **Record Keeping**

Written reports about children with SEN are kept under lock in the LS room.

- The class teacher, learning support/resource teachers, SENO, psychologists, parents and health workers have access to the report. Bearing in mind the child's entitlement to confidentiality, access is on a need to know basis.
- In the case that members of staff are shared between schools, reports are kept in the school in which the child is registered. Records are retained until the child is 21 years of age.
- The class teacher, learning support/resource teacher and principal are responsible for contributing to the child's file.
- Information of the child's attendance, progress and special needs are made available to other agencies, including other schools when the pupil transfers.

### **Role and Responsibilities**

The class teacher, principal, Learning Support teachers and Special Needs Assistants are responsible for the implementation of this policy. Special Education Needs teachers and the principal that are responsible for the coordination, implementation and review of this policy.

### ***Review***

This policy will be reviewed every third year or earlier if the need arises.

### ***Ratification and Communication***

*This policy was updated by the Board of Management in \_\_\_\_\_.*  
*A copy of the policy will be available to each member of staff on Aladdin and available to each parent from our school website.*

Síithe: \_\_\_\_\_ Dáta: \_\_\_\_\_

Cathaoirleach