

# Special Educational Needs (SEN) Policy

## St Aidan's Community College

The SEN Policy of St Aidan's Community College is published in accordance with the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004, Education Act 1998, the Education (Welfare Act) 2000 and the Equal Status Act 2000

The policy is informed by best practice as outlined in all current and relevant department circulars and guidelines including NCSE Continuum of Support, Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools - Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools, Circulars 14/17 and 12/05.

The EPSEN Act states:

- *'The education of people which such needs shall wherever possible take place in an inclusive environment with those who do not have such needs*
- *People with special educational needs shall have the same right to avail of and benefit from appropriate education as do their peers who do not have such needs'*

Therefore, St Aidan's Community College welcomes all students for whom the school can provide appropriate education. (Admissions policy is on the school website or hard copy is available on request.)

The college spirit is enshrined in our motto: 'Bíodh bhur solas ag taitneamh' – 'Let your light shine'. Each student has ideals to cherish and talents to develop. The aim of the college is to ensure that each student lets her or his light shine; cherishes her or his ideals whilst respecting the ideals of others; develops her or his talents whilst respecting the talents of all.

St Aidan's Community College aims, with the resources available, to provide a caring and nurturing environment which will allow each student to develop intellectually, physically, morally, socially and spiritually so as to give them the best possible start in life and help prepare them to fulfil their role in society. We make every effort to ensure that the uniqueness and dignity of each person is respected and responded to, and that each student feels known and cared for, especially through the pastoral care system in the school.

The purpose of this SEN policy is to provide practical guidance for teachers, parents and other interested parties on the provision of support for students with special needs within the school.

## Identifying Pupils with Additional Needs

It is the policy of the school to try to identify at an early stage of the admissions process students who may have special educational needs. The school will make every effort to become familiar with these needs and to make the necessary arrangements to meet them. The school will request access to the students' records from Primary school/individual learning programme.

Parents/guardians will be required to provide information on educational, medical or psychological reports and or multi-disciplinary team reports relevant to the education of the student. They will be requested to sign a form giving the school permission to acquire/obtain a copy of any educational and/or Psychological Assessment Report(s) on the student, and to make a copy of same to forward to the National Council for Special Education/ETB/DESk when applying for resources for the student. Parents/Guardians will be required to provide written information on the education plan or programme being provided for the student prior to their application for enrolment.

If a student has not to date been formally assessed by an appropriate professional, written consent of parents/guardians for the student to be assessed, may be required. The school may not accept responsibility for costs associated with such assessments as may be required.

When enrolling a child with special needs, the parents/guardians will be informed of what the school can offer the child and the resources available in the school. The school will assess how best it can meet the needs of the child.

Where it is deemed that additional and/or special resources are required, the Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO) will be informed and such resources will be requested. The school will follow the procedures set down by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). The co-operation and support of parents/guardians will be required in the pursuit of resources, etc.

The parents/guardians will be informed of the response of the NCSE to the resources applied for, and whether or not in the school's judgement the resources allocated are adequate to meet the needs of the child.

If the school deems the resources allocated are inadequate, or in the case where no additional resources are allocated, the parents/guardians will be required to state in writing whether or not they want their child to attend this school/continue their child's education in this school with the limited resources the school can offer. Attendance in St Aidan's may have to be deferred until adequate resources are put in place, these details will be discussed with parents and the NCSE.

The school will use the resources, both financial and personnel resources, provided by the National Council for Special Education/Department of Education and Skills to make

reasonable provision and accommodation for students with disabilities or special educational needs so that these students are free to participate in the life of the school in so far as is practicable.

### **Cognitive Ability Testing (CATS)**

These tests are carried out to get baseline data for all students entering 1<sup>st</sup> year. They also allow us to identify areas of strength or weakness for students. Further CAT testing is carried out in Transition Year to check for progression and career possibilities.

### **Assistive Technology**

The SEN Department assumes responsibility for applications for the use of assistive technology only where it is explicitly advised by a professional assessment that a student requires the use of same. Assistive Technology Policy is available on request.

### **Reasonable Accommodations in Certificate Exams (RACE)**

A range of provisions may be available for students with SEN sitting the State Junior and Leaving Certificate exams, depending on the extent of their difficulties. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Reader
- Scribe
- Spelling and Grammar Waiver (English/Irish/Language subjects only)
- Use of Word Processor (laptop) or Tape Recorder
- Separate Centre
- Rest breaks
- Additional Time
- Enlarged or Modified Exam Papers (Visual/Physical Difficulties)
- Helper in Practical Exams
- Modified Orals/Aurals

Applications are currently made to the State Examinations Commission (SEC) in Junior Cert and Leaving Cert years, once the scheme is issued by the SEC.

Where students are eligible for reasonable accommodations in examinations, the school will attempt to provide such accommodations in House Exams, prioritising students in third and sixth year, resources permitting.

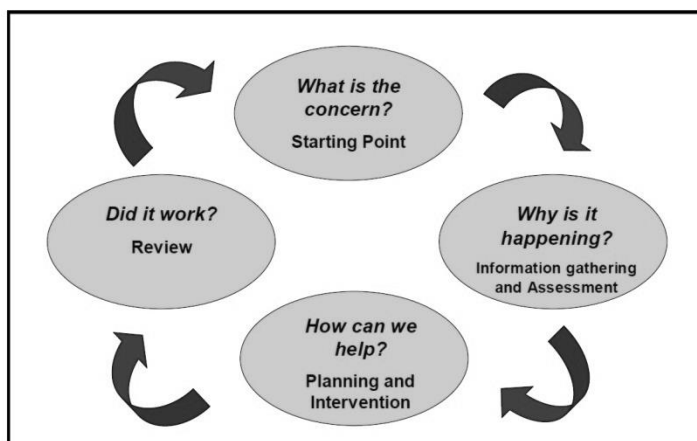
The SEN Department may conduct screening tests to determine eligibility for reasonable accommodations and reserves the right to process applications where insufficient evidence of a disability exists.

## Continuum of Support

We use the Continuum of Support Framework set out by the Department of Education to identify and support children with additional needs. Like this framework, we recognise that special educational needs occur along a continuum, ranging from mild to severe, and from transient to long-term and that pupils require different levels of support depending on their identified additional needs. By using this framework, it helps us implement a staged approach to ensure that our support and interventions are incremental, moving from class-based interventions to more intensive and individualised support, and are informed by careful monitoring of progress.

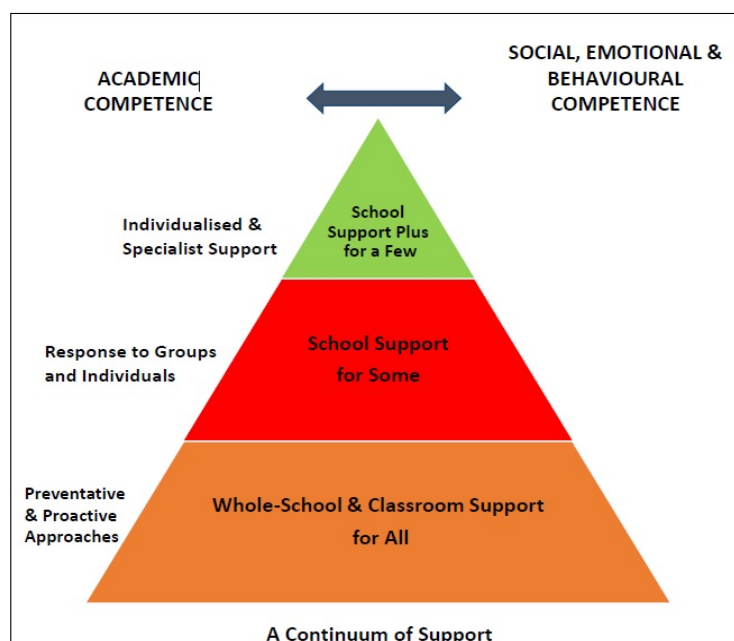
The Continuum of Support is a problem-solving model of assessment and intervention that enables us to gather and analyse data, as well as to plan and review the progress of individual pupils.

This problem-solving process is illustrated as follows:



Identification of educational needs is central to our policy and the new allocation model. By using the Continuum of Support framework, we can identify pupils' educational needs, to include academic, social and emotional needs, as well as needs associated with physical, - sensory, language and communication difficulties. This, in turn, allows us to identify and respond to needs in a flexible way.

**The Continuum of Support suggests the following levels of support:**



### ***STAGE 1 CLASSROOM SUPPORT***

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. Problem-solving at this level typically begins when a parent or teacher has concerns about an individual pupil. The teacher, Class Co-ordinator 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.

### ***STAGE 2 SCHOOL SUPPORT***

In some cases, interventions at classroom support level are not enough to fully meet the pupil's special educational needs. School Support may, therefore, be required. The class teacher needs to involve the Special Education Teacher Team (SET Team) in the problem-solving process at this point and it involves more systematic gathering of information and the development and monitoring of a School Support Plan.

### ***STAGE 3 SCHOOL SUPPORT PLUS***

If a pupil's special educational needs are **severe and/or persistent**, they are likely to need intensive support. School Support Plus will generally involve personnel outside the school team in the problem solving, assessment and intervention process. However, the information from Classroom and School Support work will provide the starting point for problem-solving at this level. Classroom support and school support will continue to be an important element of his/her individual education plan.

### ***Role of Parents/Guardians:***

Collaboration and sharing of relevant information between home and school are essential elements of our SEN policy. Parents/Guardians through their unique knowledge of their own children have much to contribute to their child's learning.

#### Parent/Guardian should:

- share any information, reports or reports pending from health professionals, and/or concerns regarding their child's development. Copies of professional reports should be provided to the school at the enrolment stage
- inform the post-primary school of their child's needs, at the transition stage
- support the work of the school and keep the class tutor/Year Head/ Teacher informed of the progress and challenges they observe in their child's learning
- attend meetings arranged by the class teacher or SET team
- support the targets outlined in their child's support plans and engage in all suggested home-based activities
- provide certificates for the exemption from the study of Irish. Requests for exemption in Post Primary schools will be processed as per circular 0053/2019

### ***Role of Pupils:***

Pupils who are in receipt of supplementary teaching should, as appropriate:

- be given the opportunity to contribute to the setting of the medium and short-term learning targets
- become familiar with the targets that have been set for them
- develop 'ownership' of the skills and strategies that are taught during supplementary teaching and learn to apply these learning strategies and skills to improve their own learning
- contribute to the evaluation of their progress by participating in appropriate assessment activities, including self-assessment

### **Role of Board of Management**

The Board of Management shall make reasonable provision and accommodation for students with a disability or other special educational needs by:

- Overseeing the development, implementation, and review of the provision of support for students with special needs.
- Ensure adequate classroom accommodation and teaching resources are provided.
- Provide a secure facility for storage or records in relation to pupils.
- Budget for on-going support for Professional Development for staff.
- Review and approve SEN policy upon submission.

## **Role of Principal**

The Department's post-primary guidelines on inclusion outlines the role of the school principal in supporting students with special educational needs. It states that 'Under current legislation the principal of the school has overall responsibility for ensuring that the special educational needs of students are met.

The role of the school principal includes the following:

- Assume overall responsibility for the development and implementation of the school's policies and procedures relating to the inclusion of students with special educational needs.
- Oversee a whole-school approach to assessment and screening to identify needs and to guide the allocation of appropriate supports.
- Ensure effective engagement with feeder primary schools to support the transition of students with special educational needs.
- In collaboration with the in-school management team, discharge a key function in the deployment of staff, allocation of resources, organisation of students and timetabling.
- Ensure that systems are in place for effective sharing of relevant information on students' needs with all subject teachers.
- Facilitate the continuing professional development of all teachers in relation to the education of students with special educational needs, and ensure that all school staff (subject teachers and special education teachers, guidance counsellors, special needs assistants) are clear regarding their roles and responsibilities in this area.
- Ensure that whole-school procedures are established to facilitate the effective involvement of parents, students and external professionals/agencies

## **Role of SEN co-ordinator (SENCO):**

- communicate with the principal in relation to SEN matters on an on-going basis
- liaise with external agencies about the provision for pupils with additional needs
- liaise with the NEPS psychologist, the SET/Support team and class teachers to prioritise children for psychological assessments (NEPS)
- meet with parents of incoming students to identify needs and gather documentation
- liaise with SEN Support Teachers to identify, support and monitor children with additional needs
- co-ordinate regular SET team planning meetings to ensure effective communication and support for children with additional needs
- collaborate with the SET team in creating timetables for additional support
- meet with parents regarding any concerns about their child, advise parents on procedures for availing of special needs services and update them regarding their progress

- co-ordinate the screening of pupils for additional support, using the results of standardised tests
- select children for external diagnostic assessment, where parental permission has been sought and granted
- Co-ordinate screening for RACE accommodations
- maintain lists, database and hard copy files of pupils who are receiving additional support including Irish exemptions, Assistive Technology & student recommendations
- Liaise with the school Chaplain and Career Guidance Teacher, SCP, BFL and HSLO that are all interlinked to provide a scaffolding support system for students who may have various complex needs
- Oversee CAT testing
- Process all applications for ATS hours, SNA hours and Assistive Technology

The role of the SENCO with relation to provision is to:

- Identify all the pupils in need of additional support.
- Identify the level of intervention required on the basis of the pupils' learning needs
- Identify the members of the teaching staff who will be allocated to the identified pupils.
- Allocate the identified staff members to the pupils, taking account of:
  - the programme needs of individual pupils and groups of pupils, including whether it is short-term/focused intervention or long-term/continuing support
  - the time available to all pupils and the proportion of time needed by individual pupils and groups of pupils, based on identified needs
  - the expertise of the teachers
  - practical and logistical considerations, including increasing chances for liaising with mainstream class teachers, availability of staff at times of greatest need, etc.
- Cross-reference the programme needs of pupils with learning needs and consider common needs that can be met by grouping to ensure effective and efficient teaching and learning approaches. Determine which teacher or teachers will cater for these groups.
- Establish a tracking and recording system to ensure that a record is maintained of all pupils who are receiving additional teaching support and of their progress in response to the established interventions.
- Maintain an inventory of resources including assistive technology, textbooks, library books and ancillary materials and oral language development materials, testing materials (standardised, diagnostic, screening), reading experience, reading attainment, phonological awareness etc. Acquire materials that may be needed and make any required materials available to teachers where they are needed.



- Assist in the development and implementation of agreed whole school approaches to language development, literacy and numeracy.

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

Section 22 (1) of the Education Act 1998 states the primacy of the teacher in the education and personal development of students in schools. The classroom teacher is responsible for educating all students in his/her class, including any student with a special educational need. The class teacher has primary responsibility for the progress and care of all students in his/her classroom, including students with special educational needs.

It is the responsibility of the classroom teacher to ensure that each student is taught in a stimulating and supportive classroom environment where all students feel equal and valued.

In line with Continuum of Support Guidelines, the class teacher may gather information through formal and informal means, with a view to informing interventions. The classroom teacher also has a central role in identifying and responding to students with additional needs, including differentiating the curriculum as appropriate. These responses will be informed and assisted by collaboration with colleagues, parents/guardians and others such as the school's NEPS psychologist, and the local Special Educational Needs Organiser.

The classroom teacher will also make specific accommodations for students within the class as a result of concerns about a student's progress, application, communication, behaviour or interaction with peers and the development of a programme of differentiated instruction for that student.

The classroom teacher should:

- Identify the students in their class with SEN
- Check SEN files for recommendations
- Implement recommendations in their classroom
- Differentiate as necessary for students with SEN and note this in their class planning

### **Additional Teaching Support**

Many children require additional teaching support in schools. In such circumstances, the classroom teacher will be supported by Special Education Teachers (SET), who will have access to additional training in the area of special education, and who will work closely with the class teacher to provide additional teaching support for children with special educational needs.

The classroom teacher, in consultation with the Special Educational Needs Teacher as required, will consider ways in which the curriculum can be differentiated or adapted to suit

the needs of individual students. This may also involve identifying the most appropriate teaching strategies and programmes to meet the students needs, and whether additional teaching supports are required. Parents should normally be consulted as part of this process.

Type of Teaching provided:

Additional Teaching support can be provided in a variety of ways. The special educational needs teacher might work in the classroom with the class teacher or withdraw students in small groups and/or individually for a period of time (depending upon the nature of students needs) for intensive teaching of key skills.

The range of teaching supports should include team-teaching, small group teaching and, where necessary, individualised teaching to address specific learning needs.

Individualised learning needs can be addressed in a variety of ways and should not be solely equated with withdrawal from class for one-to-one or group tuition. Configurations of team-teaching have been shown to provide an appropriate model for engaging with individual needs in the collective setting of the classroom. As necessary, this can be combined with withdrawal for intensive teaching of specific skills, based on level of need.

The provision of support for small groups of students, or use of in class support teaching for a number of students, as opposed to primarily one to one teaching, also means that qualifying students will often be able to receive more support than they otherwise would have done.

***Special Education Teacher (SET)***

The SET teacher/Class Support teacher/ the Team Teacher should:

- familiarise themselves with a wide range of teaching approaches, methodologies and resources to cater for particular learning styles and to meet a variety of need
- assist in the implementation of a broad range of whole school strategies
- collaboratively develop Individual Student Support Plan for each pupil selected for school support teaching with class teachers and other staff
- meet with class Teachers, parents/guardians and other staff members to identify priority learning goals for each pupil in receipt of School Support Plus and who require a School Support Plan
- collaborate with class teachers and relevant staff to develop an Individual Education Plan for each pupil in receipt of School Support Plus
- regularly meet with class teachers, relevant staff to review Support Plan outlining concerns, targets and strategies
- meet twice a year with class teachers, relevant staff and parents to review Support Plan

- update and maintain planning and progress records for each individual or group of pupils in receipt of school support
- provide supplementary teaching for literacy and numeracy on a withdrawal and in-class support basis
- support whole-school procedures for screening
- administer and interpret diagnostic tests and inform class teachers and parents of the outcomes
- meet with parents regarding any concerns about their child and update them regarding their progress

### **Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)**

SNAs are provided specifically to assist schools to cater for pupils with disabilities, who have additional and significant care needs, in an educational context and where the nature of these care needs have been outlined in medical and other professional reports as being so significant that a pupil will require additional adult assistance in order to be able to attend school and to participate in education

Special Needs Assistants are recruited specifically to assist schools in providing the necessary non-teaching services to pupils with assessed educational needs. Their duties (Circulars 12/05 & 71/2011) are assigned by the Principal acting on behalf of the Board of Management. Their work is supervised either by the Principal or another teacher as determined by the Principal.

Those duties involve tasks of a non-teaching nature such as:

- Preparation and tidying up of classrooms
- Assisting school children to board and alight from school buses. Where necessary travel as escort during school hours on school buses may be required.
- Special assistance as necessary for children with particular difficulties e.g. helping special needs pupils with typing or writing or computers or other use of equipment.
- Assistance with clothing, feeding, toileting and general hygiene and being mindful of health and safety needs of the pupil.
- Assisting on out-of-school visits, walks, examinations and similar activities.
- Assisting the teachers in the supervision of pupils during assembly, recreation and dispersal from the classroom for one reason or another.
- Accompanying individuals or small groups who may have to be withdrawn temporarily from the classroom for one reason or another.
- General assistance to the class teachers, under the direction of the Principal, with duties of a non-teaching nature.
- Participation with school development planning, where appropriate, and cooperation with any such changes with policies and practices arising from the school development process.
- Engagement with parents of special needs pupils in both formal and informal structures as required and directed by school management.

The SNA should:

- support the needs of pupils in effectively accessing the curriculum
- contribute to the quality of care and welfare of the pupils
- support learning and teaching in the classroom
- attend, where possible, training courses/workshops provided by the BOM
- attend Support meetings and/or meetings with relevant professionals, when necessary
- ensure the safety of the SEN pupils in the schoolyard, and be present for the duration of the yard breaks along with the teachers on duty
- maintain a record of support provided to their SEN pupil
- accompany SEN pupil to supplementary lessons when appropriate

### **Level 2 Learning Programmes**

Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LPs) and qualification are targeted at a very specific group of students who have general learning disabilities in the higher functioning moderate and low functioning mild categories. These are students who are most likely to be in the category that requires School PLUS Support (A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools Guidelines, National Educational Psychological Service, 2007).

These students will benefit from an L2LP as it purposely focuses on development and learning in such areas as: elementary literacy and numeracy, language and communication, mobility and leisure skills, motor coordination and social and personal development

The Learning Programmes are built around Priority Learning Units (PLUs):

- Communicating and Literacy
- Numeracy
- Personal Care
- Living in a Community
- Preparing for Work

In addition, students following L2LPs undertake 2 short courses which have also been aligned to Level 2 of the NFQ. Students undertaking L2LPs are awarded the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA). This is a school certificate awarded to all students at the end of their Junior Cycle programme in recognition of the full range of their achievements at this stage of their education.

The junior cycle is the final phase of compulsory education and it covers a critically important period in the lives of all young people. It is a time of change, of growth and development for students as they move from childhood towards early adulthood. While recognising that young people in junior cycle can display different degrees of maturity and rates of progress, preparation for adult living often occurs implicitly. The students of Level 2 Learning Programmes need programmes that explicitly identify and develop the key areas of learning needed for adult living.

### **Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Class**

The development of an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) class in St Aidan's Community College is based on the philosophy of educational inclusion such that students with specialised needs should receive their education within the most supportive environment with a focus on realising the full potential of each individual student. The ASD class in St Aidan's will develop the students' life skills and prepare them for life after school in an ever-evolving model of best practice.

#### **Class Places**

- The ASD class can enrol a maximum of 6 students as per Department of Education and Skills guidelines.
- Students must have a diagnosis of Autism meeting DSM IV/V or ICD diagnostic criteria.
- A recommendation of a special class placement in a mainstream school is required. This recommendation must be made by the professional and indicated in the report.
- Applicants will have the potential to access the mainstream curriculum or part of the mainstream curriculum with the aid of the support class. Students will be registered with their relevant year/class group.
- St Aidan's Community College provides a support class that is an open, inclusive and unrestricted environment and setting. This class is not a high dependency unit.
- Applicants must have completed primary school education or equivalent.

Details for enrolment in the ASD class are outlined in the schools admissions policy available on line or in hard copy by request.

#### **Determining suitability for the ASD Class**

In order to determine suitability for a student we require that the Principal and/or selected member/members of the ASD class staff are facilitated in contacting the Principal of the feeder school and/or any other school personnel (such as mainstream teachers, resource teachers and Special Needs Assistants) who are deemed to have played a significant role in the applicant pupil's education to that point. Consultation with the SENO will also be part of this process.

#### **Administration and Record-Keeping**

- All information regarding students will be treated in the utmost confidence at all times and is disclosed on a need-to-know basis.
- Information stored digitally is limited to professional recommendations or other summary information it has been deemed appropriate to make known to relevant staff.
- The SEN Department does not retain originals of any reports.
- All documentation is stored securely and is not to be copied or removed from storage without the express permission of the Principal.

All records are merged with the student's main file after a student has left the school. These records are kept for a period of 5 years after the date of the student's intended year for sitting the Leaving Certificate.

Other agencies involved in supporting students with SEN include:

- The National Council for Special Education (NCSE)/Special Educational Needs Officer (SENO)
- National Educational Psychology Service (NEPS)
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
- State Exams Commission (SEC)
- Community Occupational Therapy Service
- Enable Ireland
- Visiting Teachers for the Visually Impaired/ Hard of Hearing

Ratified by Board of Management on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2020

Signed : \_\_\_\_\_ (Chairperson BOM)