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Special Educational Needs Policy

Introductory Statement

St. Mark's Senior National School is co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Dublin. It is an 'ordinary' mainstream primary school, catering for a full cross section of children. The purpose of this S.E.N. policy is to provide practical guidance for teachers, parents and other interested parties on the provision of effective learning support to pupils experiencing low achievement and / or learning difficulties, as well as to fulfil our obligations under the Education Act 1998.

Children from 3rd to 6th attend the senior school. There are approximately 520 children in the senior school.

- 19 main stream classes,
- 1 M.G.L.D. Special Class.
- 10 Special Needs Resource Teachers
- 4 E.A.L. Teachers
- 1 Administrative Principal.
- 10 Special Needs Assistants

Beliefs and Principle Statement

It is envisaged that Special Educational Needs Policy is based on the following principles.

- effective whole school policies and parental involvement.
- prevention of failure.
- provision of intensive early intervention.
- direction of resources towards pupils in greatest need.

Implementation and Review

The implementation of this Policy commenced in September 2015. It will be reviewed annually, or as circumstances may warrant.

Communication

All policies will be available for viewing on the school website or through the school office.

Aims

The principle aim of special needs teaching is to optimise the teaching and learning process in order to enable pupils with learning difficulties to achieve adequate levels of proficiency in literacy, numeracy and personal development before leaving primary school.

This would enable pupils to:

- participate in the full curriculum for their class level.
- develop positive self esteem and positive attitudes about school and learning in these pupils.
- to monitor their own learning and become independent learners.
- to provide supplementary teaching and additional support and resources for these pupils.
- to share with their peers as complete an educational experience as is possible.

The following aims would also form part of our policy:

- to involve parents in supporting their children's learning through effective parent support programmes.

- to foster collaboration among teachers in the implementation of whole school policies on special needs support for these pupils.
- to establish early intervention programmes and other programmes designed to enhance learning and to support pupils with special needs.

Inclusion

- the school will take guidance in the formulation of the school's special needs policy from the provisions outlined in:
 - **The Education Act 1998,**
 - **Equal Status Act 2000,**
 - **Education Welfare Act 2000**
 - **Education for Persons with Disabilities Act 2004**
 - **Education for persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004**
- pupils with special educational needs will be welcomed and integrated into the life of the school and classroom.
- all school employees will be made aware of this integration of pupils with special needs within the school.

Admissions

- the school has an Admissions & Participation Policy.
- within this policy provision has been made for special needs pupils.
- parents are requested to notify the school of their child's special needs on enrolment.
- information on all previous assessments should be made known to the school principal.
- additional pupil requirements and provisions should also be made known to the school in advance of application.

The principal aim of Special Needs Support is to optimise the teaching and learning process so as to enable pupils with learning difficulties to achieve adequate levels of proficiency in literacy and numeracy before leaving primary school.

Specific Objectives of Special Needs Support

Through the implementation of this policy we strive to:

- Facilitate pupils to participate in the full curriculum for their class level.
- Develop positive self-esteem and positive attitudes to school and learning.
- Enable pupils to monitor their own learning and become independent learners within their own ability.
- Involve parents in supporting their children'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.
- Prevention of failure at senior school entry level.
- Provision of intensive early intervention
- Direction of resources towards pupils in greatest need.

Prevention Strategies

As a means of preventing the occurrence of learning difficulties as far as possible, the following strategies are being implemented:

- The development and implementation of agreed whole school approaches to language development, e.g. oral language, phonological awareness, reading and writing skills.
- The development and implementation of agreed whole school approaches to the teaching of aspects of Maths, e.g. our whole school approach to the Language of Tables and Subtraction.
- Promotion of parental understanding and involvement through their attendance at an induction meeting for the parents of incoming 3rd class pupils, the provision of the Tips for Parents booklet, the arrangement of formal and informal Parent-Teacher Meetings, and provision of regular school newsletter as well as ongoing collaboration with Parents' Association.
- Implementation of Reading for Enjoyment and Pleasure Programme R.E.P. throughout the school to promote improved levels of Literacy.
- All groups are banded according to the child's Reading Age.
- Ongoing observation and assessment of pupils by the Class Teacher.

R.E.P. Reading for Enjoyment and Pleasure Programme

St. Mark's operates R.E.P., Reading for Enjoyment and Pleasure. Children are banded according to their reading ages. R.E.P. is timetabled each morning, Monday through to Friday from 9.00 a.m. to 9.30 a.m. This ensures that all pupils are working at a level appropriate with their level of reading ability. Where G.A.M. pupils are not in receipt of specific resource class instruction, their needs are catered for within these banded R.E.P. groupings. R.E.P. is a whole school in class initiative to encourage the enjoyment and improvement of reading. The aim is to improve the reading skills of all pupils. Students who find reading challenging are placed in small groups with a structured reading programme (PM+ Reading Scheme) The more able students are given more challenging material e.g. novels to boost their independent reading skills. ICT using the Computer Room Computers and Mobile iPads Stations will be used to support the programme.

Selection of Pupils for Special Needs Support

- All children with Psychological Assessments who have been recommended L.I.T.H. resource hours are given priority according to Appendix 6 Disability Codes N.C.S.E. and Appendix 1 Policy for Allocation of Additional Hours N.C.S.E.
- All other class pupils are screened annually, using appropriate standardised tests.
- teacher and parent observations.
- standardised tests e.g. New N.R.I.T., Drumcondra Attainment Tests for Reading and Maths.
- psychological assessments by outside agencies e.g. N.E.P.S.
- behavioural assessments e.g. N.E.P.S., Lucena Clinic, H.S.E.
- physical / clinical assessments e.g. H.S.E.
- Any new pupil enrolling in the school will be screened by the class teachers to assess their abilities. Information on any previous special needs support provision should be made known to the school.

Priority for Special Needs Support is given to those pupils who perform at or below the 10th Percentile, excluding in the main pupils who receive additional support as a result of recommendations from assessments.

In the case of pupils performing at or below the 10th percentile, the screening process is followed by consultative meetings between the Class Teacher, the Special Needs Teacher and the Parents concerning the pupil's performance. Supplementary teaching may then be offered. Parents may choose not to avail of this service.

Provision of Supplementary Teaching

The primary work of the Support Teachers is the provision of supplementary teaching to the pupils identified above. This may involve withdrawing for individual or small group work or in class support for example R.E.P. and Inclass Maths Support. St. Mark's currently operates inclass support in 5th and 6th classes. In 6th class the pupils are banded according to their level of mathematical ability.

- One to one teaching may have to be provided to pupils with specific educational needs or behaviour problems. L.I.T.H. Low Incidence Teaching Hours.
- Classes will be intensive in terms of frequency.
- A system of withdrawal and / or Inclass Teacher Support will operate in response to the needs of these individual pupils.
- Children with specific resource hours are withdrawn for individual support.
- The Class Teacher and the Learning Support Teacher will meet to devise an Individual Education Plan (I.E.P.) or Group Education Plan (G.E.P.), in consultation with the Principal and parents. The pupil may also be involved in contributing to setting their own short-term targets.

Record Keeping

- at present all pupils standardised test results are kept on Aladdin, an online school database and on file with the Special Needs Coordinator.
- psychological assessments and recommendations are also kept in the in the children files in the strong room and the principal's office.
- support teachers have individual files and learning programmes containing all the relevant information pertaining to their pupils with special needs.
- all pupils have individual information files kept in a secure area for a period of ten years on leaving the school.
- samples of written / oral work kept in pupils individual files by support teachers.

Individual Learning Plan / Group Education Plan

The Individual Learning Plan / Group Education Plan will be guided by the Learning Support Guidelines issued by D.O.E. in 2000 and Guidelines on The Individual Education Plan Process N.C.S.E. 2006. The following will form important parts of any individual pupil plan:

- Details from the Class Teacher.
- Assessment Results.
- Other relevant information, e.g. reports from other agencies.
- Learning strengths and attainments.
- Priority Learning Needs.
- Learning Targets.
- Class based Learning Activities.
- Strategies to suit the individual learning styles of the pupil.
- Supplementary support activities to include I.C.T.
- Home Support Activities.

Each plan will be monitored through: teacher observation, the keeping of planning / progress records and through the pupil's own feedback.

A review will take place at the end of each Instructional Term. The Support Teacher and / or the Class Teacher may meet the parents to discuss the child's progress in the light of the review.

Timetabling

- The provision of Special Needs Support is in addition to the regular class teaching.
- Effort is made to ensure that pupils do not miss out on the same curricular area each time they attend Special Needs Support where possible.
- A flexible approach to timetabling is adopted by the Class Teacher to allow for support by the Special Needs Team.
- Children may be withdrawn from their classroom to receive special needs support.

Provision of Resources

Resources for the provision of Special Needs Support include: a variety of textbooks, library books, I.C.T educational software and appropriate weblinks, ancillary materials, educational, social skills games and oral language development materials. A variety of testing materials are also in use. Funding for materials comes from D.E.S. Grant for Standardised Testing, Board Of Management , D.E.S. Special Class extra capitation and fund-raising generated by the school to supplement resources.

Continuing and Discontinuing Supplementary Teaching

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Referral to out of School Agencies

The school is using a three staged approach to identifying pupils with special needs. These were outlined in the Special Education Circular 24-03

Stage One

- teacher / parent observations of problems in the child's learning, behavioural and emotional development.
- indicators of learning problems observed from the school's standardised test screening programme.
- class teacher will draw up a simple plan of intervention to assist with problem areas in the pupil's learning.

If no improvement in the pupils condition is recorded over an agreed term period the support team are informed about moving to Stage Two of the process.

Stage Two

- at this stage the help of the special needs team is requested with parental approval.
- the class teacher, the special needs team and the parent agree to allow pupil attend supplementary support classes.
- the pupil's progress at this stage will be monitored and if a problem still exists it may be necessary to move to stage three of the process.

In the case of children with significant behavioural difficulties it may be necessary to consult the N.E.P.S.. psychologist or a psychologist employed by the H.S.E.. This can only be done with parental approval.

Stage Three

This is the point at which outside agencies become involved. At this stage if the interventions at stage two have proved unsuccessful, the school, with parental approval, may seek professional assessment from a relevant specialist.

These may be:

- educational psychologist
- clinical psychologist
- speech and language therapist
- medical professional

The class teacher, special needs team, parents and principal in consultation with outside agencies draw up a suitable learning plan according to the recommendations made by the relevant outside agencies.

· Procedure for consulting with outside agencies.

- The Principal and / or Special Needs Support Coordinator and / or Class Teacher meet with the parents to discuss the need for the referral and to seek consent to avail of help from outside agencies.
- The Principal and / or Special Needs Co-ordinator arrange the referral of pupils to outside agencies, e.g. Educational Psychologist.
- The Special Needs Coordinator in consultation with the Class Teacher and parents or guardians complete the necessary referral form in consultation with the appropriate school personnel.
- The external professional visits the school to meet with the pupil, parents, principal, Class Teacher and the Special Needs Co-ordinator as appropriate, and the assessment is conducted.
- This is followed by a return visit at which findings are discussed, recommendations are considered and an appropriate response is agreed.
- Where concern arises regarding the manner of speed of the follow-through post assessment, such concern is pursued by the Principal with the out of school agency concerned.

Staff Roles and Responsibilities

Special Needs Support is a collaborative responsibility shared by all partners in the learning experiences. It is important that all partners contribute in the planning and implementation of our school plan on Special Needs Support.

Board of Management

The role of the Board of Management is to:

- Oversee the development, implementation and review of school policy on special needs services in the school.
- Ensure adequate classroom accommodation and teaching resources are provided for the Support Teachers.
- Provide a secure facility both online and offline for storage of records in relation to pupils in receipt of Special Needs Support.
- Budget for ongoing support for Professional Development in Special Needs 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 Special Needs Support in co-operation with the Board of Management, Teachers and Parents.
- Work with teachers and parents in the development of the school plan on learning support in the context of Special Needs Education
- Monitor the implementation of the school plan on Special Needs Support on an ongoing basis
- Work closely with the S.E.N. Co-ordinator, S.E.N. team and parents in the selection of pupils for special needs assistance.
- liaise with D.E.S., S.E.N.O., N.E.P.S, S.E.S.S. and outside support agencies.
- Oversee the implementation of a whole-school assessment and screening programme to identify pupils with very low achievement and learning difficulties so that these pupils 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.
- Help teachers increase their knowledge and skills in the area of Special Needs

Special Needs Co-ordinator

- overseeing the implementation of the special needs services.
- maintaining a list of pupils who are receiving supplementary teaching and or special educational services.
- supporting a whole school tracking system to monitor the progress of children with special needs.
- liaising with external agencies such as psychological services to arrange assessments and special provision for pupils with special needs.
- communicating with class teachers and providing advice on programme planning for pupils with special needs.
- Monitor new pupils enrolling in the school that may require Special Needs Support.

The work of the Special Needs Co-ordinator will be supported within the school by the principal and members of the Special Needs Team.

Class Teacher

The class teacher has primary responsibility for the progress of all pupils in his/her class including those with special needs. In supporting the development and implementation of the school plan on Special Needs Education, the class teacher should:

- Implement teaching programmes which optimise the learning of all pupils and if possible prevent the emergence of learning difficulties.
- Implement the school policies on screening and selecting pupils for supplementary teaching in English and Maths by co-operating and assisting with the administration and scoring of appropriate standardised tests and other screening measures.
- For each pupil who is in receipt of supplementary teaching, to collaborate with the Special Needs Teacher in the development of a learning programme to suit the learning style of the pupil.

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

- Such children should be prioritised when accessing information from previous class teacher.
- Priority when establishing initial parental contact.
- Group teaching, R.E.P. and Inclass Maths Support Teaching
- Modify presentation and questioning techniques to maximise the involvement of pupils with low achievement in class activities.
- Placing emphasis on oral language development across the curriculum.
- Providing pupils with extra tutoring in the key basic skills in literacy and numeracy.
- Setting learning targets at an appropriate level.
- Providing learning activities and material which are suitably challenging but which also ensure success and progress.
- Encourage high achievers to work with special needs pupils e.g. peer mentoring, paired reading.
- Applying assessments and tests which offer challenge and opportunities for success to children of all levels of achievement.

A key role of successful Special Needs Support is a very high level of consultation and co-operation between the Class Teacher and the Special Needs Team.

Special Needs Teacher

The roles of the Special Needs Teacher is to:

- Develop an individual profile and learning programme for each pupil who has been psychologically assessed for supplementary teaching in consultation with: Class Teacher, Principal, Parents and other relevant agencies e.g. N.E.P.S.
- Maintain planning and progress records for assessed individuals or group of pupils in receipt of Special Needs Support.
- Provide teaching or materials support in English and Maths to pupils in the school who experience low achievement, in accordance with the school's screening criteria.
- Contribute to the development of policy on Special Needs Support at whole school level.
- Provide advice to the Class Teachers in such areas as individual pupils assessment and programme planning, as well as approaches to learning styles, language development, reading, writing, mathematics and I.C.T. for pupils experiencing difficulties.
- Contribute at school level to decision making regarding the purchase of learning resource books and materials to be made available to pupils with learning difficulties in their mainstream classrooms and in the Special Needs Area.
- Maintain a list of pupils who are receiving supplementary teaching and special education support.
- Track the progress pupils who have discontinued Special Needs Support.
- Seek parental support in implementing a learning programme for their child.

Parents

The role of parents supporting the Special Needs Education for their children is vital to its success. Parents contribute through:

- Regular communication with the Class Teacher and Special Needs Teacher.
- Creating a supportive home environment where literacy and learning can thrive.
- Fostering positive attitudes about school and learning in the child.
- Participation in school reading programme. R.E.P. Reading for Enjoyment and Pleasure at home
- Visiting the library with their child and selecting suitable materials.
- Developing the child's oral language.
- Developing the child's social mathematics.
- Encouraging and supporting the pupil with special needs and accepting the achievements they make.

Special Needs Assistants.

The SNA acts in a care and support role that is non-teaching in nature and works under the guidance and supervision of the Principal and/or class teacher. The role and duties of the SNA are more clearly defined in DES Circular 0030/2014.

Communication Strategies

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

- Class Teacher and the Special Needs Teacher meeting following a low score on a screening test.
- Class Teacher and parents meet following a low score on a screening test, including the seeking of approval of further diagnostic assessment and / or provision of supplementary teaching.
- The Principal meets the Special Needs Team to update and receive information on Special Needs provision in the school.
- The class teacher has primary responsibility for the progress of all pupils in his / her class including those with special needs.
- Regular communication between the Special Needs Teacher and parents
- Ongoing communication between St. Mark's Junior, Senior School and Community School regarding continuity of support for pupils transferring.
- Information and pupil details are only shared between schools with parental consent.
- Members of the Special Needs Team meet regularly to monitor the provision of the school's Special Needs Programme.

Success Criteria

It is envisaged that this school wide implementation of the Special Needs Policy will result in assisting pupils' learning in the following ways:

- Improved standards of academic and personal achievement in pupils with individual learning programmes.
- Discontinuation in the provision of Special Needs Support based on positive assessment results and improvements in certain pupils.
- Enhanced parental involvement in supporting their child's learning needs.
- Increased opportunities for effective communication between school personnel in relation to pupil's progress.
- Special Needs Provision will attempt to provide continuity in learning for children entering the school from St. Mark's Junior School.
- Positive school staff involvement in supporting Special Needs Provision within the school.

Integration of Children with a Disability and / or Special Education Needs in St. Mark's Senior National School

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

Application for all children, 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 of children with a disability and/or other special education needs is also drawn to the following points:

St Mark's Senior N.S. is an 'ordinary' mainstream school, and has higher pupil / teacher ratios such as those that apply in 'special' schools. In general the teachers in our school are trained and qualified to teach in mainstream education.

While pupils with special needs can be integrated into a mainstream class, and may be supported by a Special Needs Assistant and Resource teaching as allowed by D.E.S., this is not the same as the intensive one to one teaching s/he would enjoy in a special school.

An ordinary mainstream school does not have ancillary services enjoyed by special schools such as: speech therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy.

The school currently has facilities specially adapted for pupils with physical disability on ground floor level.

The school cannot offer any additional tuition, support and supervision beyond that which is offered to any other pupil in 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.

Notwithstanding the above points, the school is committed to providing the best possible educational service to pupils with a disability/special educational needs. To ensure this we require:

- A close level of co-operation between parents, the Class Teacher, and any other school personnel assigned to support the child.
- Parents 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, on an ongoing basis.
- An understanding from the parents that our responsibility as a school is primarily to all the children in our care.
- The Board of Management reserves the right to review the enrolment of any individual child with a disability or special needs who is having an ongoing detrimental effect on the Health and Safety of the other children in the class.

M.G.L.D. Integrated Special Classes

There is an **Integrated Mild General Learning Disability Special Class** within St. Mark's Senior N.S. The pupils attend this class daily. They spend a period of half a school day in their special class and return to their main class for the rest of the school day. The core subjects are covered with these pupils at a standard that is at their level of ability. They also partake in a life skills programme that includes: cooking, gardening, environmental awareness and social skills. When they return to their class groups they engage in all other curricular activities that their class may be involved with during the school day. Selection to the Integrated Special Class is only as a result of psychological assessments and recommendations made by an educational psychologist and sanctioned by a S.E.N.O.

Signed: 
Sr. Teresa McCullagh Chairperson B.O.M.

November 2015