

# Special Needs Education Policy

## Ballynacally National School

### **Introduction:**

A Special Needs Policy was devised by the staff of Ballynacally National School in 2002. It was implemented at this time. This document has been revised from Jan – March 2010 in response to the many changes that have come about in the area of Special Education since that date. It reflects the current practice in the school. It has been devised to comply with current legislation. The teachers involved in revising this plan were Nuala Hehir, Conor Lynch and Mary Garry. It is expected that all long term subs in our school would become familiar with this policy.

In Ballynacally, we have a shared Learning Support teacher and a Resource teacher. Our Learning Support teacher is based in our school and spends .8 of the school week here under the terms of the General Allocation Model. (See Appendix 1) We have the services of a shared Resource teacher.

### **Rationale:**

This policy is designed to cater for children with Special Educational Needs.

- It caters for pupils who upon **enrolment** are already identified as having Special Educational Needs i.e. **Low Incidence** (Resource students).
- It also caters for those children who have learning needs which do not fall under the category of Special Educational Needs and do not qualify for resource hours e.g. **High Incidence** ( Learning Support pupils).
- It also caters for children with **emerging Special Educational Needs**. Our school will follow in so far as possible, the staged approach as advised by N.E.P.S. in order to identify these children. (Special Education Circular 02/05, Appendix 2)

## **Aims:**

### **The aims of this policy are:**

- To create an environment where each pupil's social, emotional and academic strengths are met and self esteem is fostered.
- To ensure that the best possible opportunity for learning/teaching can be afforded to the pupil/teacher
- To enable the individual teacher to respond to the needs of the individual child so that they can achieve their true potential
- To ensure the parent and teacher work in partnership

## **Staff Roles and Responsibilities**

Teaching children with Special Needs is a collaborative responsibility shared by all – The Board of Management, Principal, Learning Support teacher, Class teachers and Resource teacher, parents and children in order to optimise the teaching and learning process. The Learning Support teacher in conjunction with the Principal and the teaching staff has responsibility of co-ordinating this policy.

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

- To oversee the development, implementation and review of the Special Needs Education Plan in our school.
- Ensure adequate classroom accommodation and teaching resources are provided for the Learning Support teacher and Resource teacher
- Provide a secure facility for storage of records in relation to pupils in receipt of Special Needs and Learning Support services.

## **Role of Principal**

- **Assume** overall responsibility for the development and implementation of the school's policies on Special Needs
- **Enrolment:**
- **The Principal will deal with pupils who upon enrolment are identified as having special needs.**

The Principal shall meet with the parents/guardians of the child with special educational needs to discuss their expectations for their child. The child may also be requested to attend.

Copies of reports, assessments and other relevant data to be obtained from the parents/guardians. Written permission to be received from the parents to discuss their child with the relevant agencies.

The Principal will contact the S.E.N.O. and other agencies involved with the child (if necessary) to determine the level of supports available to the child.

The Principal ensures access to all the supports necessary e.g. resource hours, mobility and care needs, S.N.A., by liaising with the relevant agencies

Once the supports are in place the parents/guardians meet with the Principal, class teacher, support teacher and S.N.A. (if applicable) to ensure a smooth transition into the school for the child with special educational needs.

Principal will review the child's placement in mainstream every term.

- Work with teachers in the development of the school plan on Learning Support and Special Needs

- Monitor the implementation of the School Plan on Learning Support and Special Needs on an ongoing basis.
- Monitor the selection of pupils for supplementary teaching, ensuring that this service is focused on the pupils with very low achievement
- Assume direct responsibility for co-ordinating Learning Support and Special Needs services
- 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 procedures to be followed in initiating referrals
- Help teachers increase their knowledge and skills in the area of Learning Support and Resource
- Liaising with external agencies such as psychologists and SENO's to arrange assessments and special provision for pupils with Special Needs.

### **Role of Class Teacher**

The Class teacher has primary responsibility for the progress of all pupils in her class including those selected for supplementary teaching and resource. In supporting the development and implementation of the School Plan on Learning Support and Special Needs the Class teacher should:

- Implement teaching programmes which optimise the learning of all pupils (i.e. differentiation) and to the greatest extent possible prevent the emergence of learning difficulties.
- Discuss any concerns that s/he may have concerning a child in his/her class with the child's parents. Concerns may relate to learning/social/emotional or behavioural difficulties. If

necessary draw up a simple plan to address these concerns within the normal classroom setting i.e. Stage 1 of Staged Process.

- Discuss concerns with the Learning Support teacher and Principal at this stage.
- Where further intervention is necessary Class teacher must move to Stage 2 and/or Stage 3 of the Staged approach in collaboration with Learning Support teacher and/or other external agencies.
- Implement the school policies on screening and selecting pupils for supplementary teaching in English and in Mathematics from Seniors to Sixth (6<sup>th</sup>) Class by administering and scoring appropriate screening measures – Micra T / Sigma T in June every year and M.I.S.T. (Senior Infants 5<sup>th</sup> term in school). (c/f Assessment Plan & Appendix 3)
- Discuss any concerns with parents re. screening tests and inform the parents of the children concerned, where diagnostic tests for Learning Support are indicated
- For each pupil who is in receipt of supplementary teaching collaborate with the Learning Support teacher in the development of an individual profile and learning programme by identifying appropriate learning targets and by organising classroom activities to achieve those targets
- For each pupil who is in receipt of supplementary teaching, adjust the classroom programmes in line with the agreed learning targets and activities

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

- ❖ Group 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
- ❖ Setting learning targets at an appropriate level
- ❖ Providing learning activities and materials which are suitably challenging but which also ensure success and progress
- ❖ Carrying out error analyses of a pupil's work to pinpoint specific areas of difficulty

A key role of successful Special Educational Needs teaching is a very high level of consultation and co-operation between the Class teacher and the Learning Support teacher. Central to this consultation is the development, implementation and review of Individual Profile and Learning Programmes

## **Learning Support**

In effect, the Learning Support year is divided into two (2) instructional terms in our school i.e. October – February, 16/20 weeks and March to June, 16/20 weeks.

The month of September is set aside for diagnostic testing, programme planning and meeting with parents of children who will receive supplementary teaching. Individual Educational Plans are discussed here. At the end of this first instructional term (Oct - Feb) a meeting is again held. These usually coincide with the school's parent/teacher meetings (February/March). If the child is performing above the percentile laid down the Learning Support teaching is to be discontinued. Otherwise, revised learning targets and activities are laid out and the new instructional term begins (March – June).

Children attending Learning Support classes are regarded as being at Stage 2 or Stage 3 i.e. School Support or School Support Plus Plan.

***The activities of the Learning Support teacher should include:***

- **Diagnostic Testing** is carried out by the Learning Support teacher. These results are interpreted and discussed with the Class teacher. **An Individual Pupil Profile and Learning Programme** are drawn up based on these results and the teacher's analysis of the child's needs. An Individual Learning Programme gives a picture of the child, his/her strengths, weaknesses, needs and learning targets for the next term. (as stated above)

The Learning Support teacher then arranges a time to meet the parent and discuss this Individual Profile and Learning Programme.

**NOTE:** From January 2010 a letter is sent to all parents informing them of the fact that their child may at any time during the school year, attend for diagnostic testing. (Appendix 3)

- ❖ **It is important to note however that no Learning Support teaching will take place without written consent from parents. (Appendix 4)**
- ❖ **It also must be noted that if parents do not want their child to attend Learning Support class – this also must be put in writing.**

These letters are kept by the Learning Support teacher in the child's file along with all test results carried out by him/her. Psychological assessments, a roll call of a child's attendance in Learning Support and any other written correspondence together with samples of the child's work are also kept in this file.

These files are kept in the Learning Support teacher's filing cabinet and are accessible to the principal and class teacher as necessary.

- Assisting in the implementation of a broad range of whole school strategies designed to enhance early learning and to prevent learning difficulties
- Maintaining a weekly/fortnightly planning and progress record or equivalent for each individual or group of pupils in receipt of learning support
- Delivering intensive early intervention programmes and providing supplementary teaching in English and Mathematics to pupils in the junior section of the school.
- Providing teaching in English and Mathematics to pupils in the senior section of the school who experience low achievement
- Contributing to the development of policy on learning at the whole school level
- Providing advice to class teacher in such areas as individual pupil assessment and programme planning, as well as approaches to language development, reading, writing and mathematics for pupils experiencing difficulties whether at Stage 1, 2 or 3 of the Staged Approach. Liaising with teachers is done informally and on Friday afternoons.
- Contributing at the school level to decision making regarding the purchase of learning resources, books and materials to be made available to pupils with learning difficulties in their mainstream classrooms and in the Learning Support teacher's room
- Performing a defined role in co-ordinating the provision of Special Needs and Learning Support services in the schools in our cluster
- Liaising with external agencies such as psychologists, speech therapists to help meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs.
- Maintaining a list of pupils who are receiving supplementary teaching.

## **Resource Teacher**

In Ballynacally NS our Resource Teacher supports children with Low-Incidence Special Needs arising from an already diagnosed disability. Such disabilities may be ...

- A hearing or visual impairment
- A physical disability
- A moderate or severe general learning disability
- Several disabilities together
- Autism or
- Speech and language disorder.

Our Resource teacher helps the child by:

- Assessing and recording the child's needs and progress
- Setting specific, time related targets for each child and agreeing these with the class teacher and principal
- Teaching the children, either in a separate room or with the rest of the child's class
- Team teaching, as long as the children concerned benefit from it
- Advising class teachers about adapting the curriculum, teaching strategies, suitable textbooks, information technology and software and other related matters;
- Meeting and advising parents, accompanied by the class teacher, as needed and
- Having short meetings in the child's interest with other professionals such as psychologist, speech and language therapists, visiting teachers and special school or special class teachers

The Resource teacher liaises with the relevant professionals in order to put effective support mechanisms in place for a pupil granted resource teaching time.

We feel it is in the interest of 'best practice' that a collaborative approach be taken by those involved. We feel the needs of the children are paramount and we value and promote interaction between the professionals which puts the child and her/his needs first always. Caring for such pupils is an inexact process at times and one where a willingness to consult, listen, change and experiment is beneficial.

## Identification and Selection of children for Learning Support

- It is the practice of our school that in general, pupils in **Junior Infants** would not attend / be withdrawn to the Learning Support Teacher. If children in Junior Infants are seen to be having learning difficulties after the first term (Christmas) a class support plan should be put in place i.e. Stage One of the Three (3) staged approach involving teacher and parents.

As there is such a strong link between A.S.M. (Auditory Sequential Memory) at the age of four (4) and a child's reading at age eight (8) it is therefore our policy to test the Junior Infants on A.S.M. during their first term at school. (before Halloween).

This is done on a one to one basis by the Learning Support Teacher. Children are asked to repeat a series of numbers and words heard by them. This test allows the teacher to keep a watch on any children that may be weak in this area with a view to reading and maths and to carry out appropriate A.S.M. exercises.

- As a strategy for Prevention of failure in Reading and/or Maths, intervention will take place in the Infant Room, generally in **Senior Infants** by the Learning Support Teacher in areas such as – A.S.M., language, shared reading, phonemic awareness, phonics etc. This early intervention may be carried out with the whole class, groups or on a one to one basis.

Topics chosen would be based on the needs of the children and would be decided upon between the Class Teacher and Learning Support Teacher.

As soon as the M.I.S.T. test has been administered in the fifth (5<sup>th</sup>) term of school, identification and selection of children for Learning Support may be even more specific.

**We feel that this is crucial.**

Early Intervention will take place in a daily basis.

*(see more under Early Intervention Programmes )*

Children will be chosen for Learning Support from First Class upwards based on results of norm referenced, standardised tests and/or teacher's recommendations.

**Priority will be given to children in receipt of Learning Support in the following order:**

- 1) Children performing below the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile in standardised test of achievement in English
- 2) Senior Infants/First Class – early intervention programmes for low achievers in English based on class teacher's observations and recommendations (M.I.S.T. test also)
- 3) Children performing below the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile in standardised test of achievement in Mathematics
- 4) Senior Infants/First Class – early intervention programmes for low achievers in Mathematics based on class teacher's observations and recommendations
- 5) Pupils performing below the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile in standardised test of achievement in English
- 6) Pupils performing below the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile in standardised test of achievement in Maths
- 7) Children above the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile are not normally entitled to Learning Support

- 8) The duration of supplementary teaching should not exceed two to three years

Arrangements for providing frequent intensive supplementary teaching to the junior end of our school is a priority with 4/5 sessions each week.

## **Prevention Strategies**

Our strategies for preventing learning difficulties are:

1. **Development** of agreed approaches to language development and to teaching other aspects of English and Mathematics in order to ensure progression and continuity from class to class (School Plan for English and Mathematics)

### **2. Early Intervention Programmes**

As already stated, we will implement Early Intervention Programmes in the early primary classes as an effective response to meeting the needs of children with low achievement. These programmes will:

- ✓ Be set within a specified time frame (13-20 weeks)
- ✓ Will be based on a shared expectation of success by everyone involved
- ✓ Involve class teaching, small group teaching or one to one teaching
- ✓ Include a strong focus on oral language and laying the foundation for meaningful reading
- ✓ Emphasise phonemic awareness
- ✓ In mathematics they focus on language development and the development of mathematical procedures and concepts

### **3. Liaising with Parents**

Effective communication with parents is critically important to the success of a Learning Support programme. Activities that may be organised to increase the involvement of parents in supporting their

children's learning, particularly parents in the learning support programme. This is carried out at parent/teacher meetings.

- The purpose and procedures of the school's learning support team
- Paired/shared reading
- Developing children's oral language through discussion
- Motivating children to read more
- Creating a home environment where literacy can thrive
- Selecting books that interest children
- Developing children's reasoning and problem solving
- Counting, measuring and other activities involving number

### **Monitoring Progress**

Children's progress is monitored and discussed between Class, Learning Support and Resource Teacher on an on-going basis by observation of children and by use of checklists, activity sheets, short tests etc through out each term or time frame given.

Screening and diagnostic tests and/or discussion with all involved in drawing up an I.E.P. establish more correctly at the end of each instructional term if targets have been reached. The Learning Support teacher has a list of diagnostic and screening tests available in the school in her 'Resource Folder'.

### **Psychological Assessments**

Following diagnostic testing and / or after a child has failed to reach specific targets, having completed a classroom and school support plan (Stage 1 & 2) a psychological assessment may be deemed necessary. In this case the parents are asked for permission to allow their child to go forward for psychological

testing. The Principal will liaise with the psychologist to set up a date for the assessment and time and date will then be forwarded to the parents who will be asked to complete the relevant NEPS forms. The forms once completed are forwarded to the psychologist.

The recommendations, in the ensuing assessment, will be carefully considered by all partners in the drawing up of the intervention programme for the student.

Psychological reports are stored in the students' individual file in the locked filing cabinet in the school's office. (See Appendix 5)

### **Transfer to Post Primary**

Every effort is made to ensure smooth transition to post-primary schools for children with special needs. The following procedures apply:

- ❖ The S.E.N.O. is informed of the transfer of a pupil with special needs to the post primary school.
- ❖ Written parental permission is sought for the transfer of copies of reports and assessments to the relevant post primary school.
- ❖ Where necessary, the teacher meets with a representative of the secondary school where the student is transferring to. At this meeting the needs of the individual students are discussed.
- ❖ Ongoing contact is maintained between Ballynacally NS and the post primary schools, if necessary, in order to facilitate an easy transition for the pupils.

### **Resources:**

Resources bought with Grant money over recent years for the two schools in our cluster are stored in the Learning Support Room in Ballynacally and labelled accordingly. All resources bought by Ballynacally NS are kept in the Learning Support room and all teachers have access to them where necessary.

Standardised tests are the remit of the individual class teachers. Diagnostic tests are sourced and stored by the Learning Support teacher.

## **Inclusion**

Children with special needs will be afforded the same rights, respect and dignity in accordance with the school mission statement.

Children with special needs are required to abide by the school rules and the Code of Behaviour unless precluded from doing so.

## **Library**

A library (shelf) of all Department circulars on Special Educational Needs and all guidelines received from NCSE and NEPS on Special Education is available to all class teachers in the school office.

## **Timetable**

The timetable for Learning Support/Resource students is agreed between the Principal, Class Teacher and Learning Support / Resource Teacher at the beginning of each instructional term. The following factors are considered when drawing up this timetable:

- Organising timetable to minimise disruption for class teacher
- Co-ordinating with the class teacher to ensure the best possible time is chosen for each student.

## **Monitoring and Reviewing of Policy**

Monitoring of this policy is an ongoing procedure.

## **Conclusion:**

This policy was revised from Jan – March 2010.

It has been reviewed again during January – March 2012.

The Learning Support teacher will co-ordinate the review of the policy.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

