



Mountrath Community School

Special Educational Needs Policy 2019 – 2021

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Introduction:

The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004) requires that:

‘A child with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with student who do not have such needs unless the nature or degree of those needs of the child is such that to do so would be inconsistent with the best interests of the child as determined in accordance with any assessment carried out under this Act, or the effective provision of education for student with whom the child is to be educated’.

Special Educational Needs (SEN) are defined in the Act as: *‘a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition...’* (Section 1, [1]).

This policy document is developed in the context set out in the Education Act (1998), Education and Welfare Act (2000) and the Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs (2004 – EPSEN). In addition, Department of Education & Skills Circulars and Learning Support Guidelines (2000) are incorporated into this policy.

Our Aims:

The Board of Management, Parents and Staff of Mountrath Community School are committed to the creation of an inclusive, supportive learning environment for all students. Our vision is of a welcoming, inclusive, vibrant community which enables all students to have access to an education which considers and plans for their specific learning needs and abilities. This includes access to a broad and balanced curriculum including extracurricular activities as appropriate and full access to the curriculum.

The SEN department works closely with senior management, subject departments and the Care team to try to provide the best support possible for the students in need.

The SEN Department aims to:

- Identify student's individual needs at the earliest possible stage so as to make provision for their needs thus raising their attainment levels
- Facilitate the social, emotional, educational development of each child
- Work in close partnership with, and involve teachers & parents/guardians of students who have special educational needs.
- Involve students, parents/guardians in the identification and review of targets, which are specific, achievable, realistic and time-related.
- Liaise with appropriate outside agencies, to support the needs and provision for students who have special educational needs.

Inclusivity & Special Educational Needs (SEN)

A student may have special educational needs if they encounter or are likely to encounter barriers to learning in mainstream education. Students may be in this category for a number of reasons: they have greater or lesser difficulties learning than their peers of a similar age and/or they have a disorder, physical or sensory disability which prevents them from using educational facilities provided in school for student of the same age.

'Inclusivity' requires understanding of and catering for the different needs of students and taking steps to reduce barriers to learning. An inclusive school must identify barriers to learning that exist in the school environment and so provide for the needs of learners so as to minimise the impact of such barriers.

Categories of Special Needs

There are a number of categories of special needs outlined in the Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs - Post-Primary Guidelines:

- Physical disability
- Hearing impairment
- Visual impairment
- Severe emotional disturbance and/or behaviour problems
- Mild general learning disability
- Borderline general learning disability
- Specific learning disability
- Moderate general learning disability
- Severe or profound general learning disability
- Autism/autistic spectrum disorder
- Students with special educational needs arising from an assessed syndrome
- Specific speech and language disorder
- Multiple disabilities

In addition to the above list, where resources that may be allocated include resource teaching support, special needs assistant support, assistive technology and special transport.

Students who score above the 95th percentile of norm referenced ability tests administered by the school or in professional assessments, will be termed gifted for the purposes of this policy. On identification of these gifted students, parents will be contacted and they may be referred to Centre for Talented Youth at DCU.

Where possible identified students will:

- receive relevant support
- receive small group tuition
- develop to their full potential
- acquire literacy and numeracy skills

Identified students may:

- have a differentiated curriculum
- have an exemption from the study of Irish (other criteria apply)
- have one-to-one tuition
- have access to homework club
- be included in the support class

The SEN team comprises of the school Principal & Deputy Principal, Special Needs Coordinator, Learning Support Teachers and Special Needs Assistants. School Guidance Counsellors have an important role in liaising with SEN Coordinator. The SEN Coordinator is responsible for managing and organising and monitoring Learning support and Resource teaching under the direction of the Principal.

Roles and Responsibilities

1. Board of Management
2. School Principal
3. SEN Coordinator
4. Resource/Learning Support teacher
5. General/Classroom teachers
6. Parents
7. Students
8. Guidance Counsellors
9. Special Needs Assistants
10. Year Head

1. Board of Management

The Board of Management has an important role in overseeing the development, monitoring and review of this school policy. The Board should ensure the best possible learning environment for students - i.e. provision of appropriate accommodation and teaching resources to facilitate all SEN requirements. They should:

- Oversee the development, implementation and review of the SEN policy.
- Support the Principal and all the staff in their professional assessments of, and provision provided for, students with Special Educational Needs.

2. School Principal

The Principal should:

- Assume overall responsibility for the development and implementation of the school's policies on learning-support and special needs.
- Support the Learning-Support Teacher in liaising with other professionals, when appropriate, regarding students with special needs.
- Monitor the implementation of the school policy on learning-support on a regular basis.
- Oversee the implementation of a whole-school assessment and screening programme to identify students with very low achievement and learning difficulties.
- Encourage teachers to increase their knowledge and skills in the area of learning support.
- Ensure that adequate classroom accommodating and teaching resources are provided for the learning-support teacher.
- Ensure that a secure facility for the storage of records relating to students in receipt of learning support is provided.
- Monitor the selection of students who are selected for learning-support and ensuring that the students are receiving adequate supplementary teaching.
- Support the coordinator in liaising with external agencies such as psychological services to arrange assessments and provision for students with special needs.
- Maintain a list of students who are receiving learning-support.
- Meet with parents of students receiving learning-support when required.
- Ensure that procedures exist for consultation with feeder primary schools with regard to the enrolment of new students with SEN.
- Ensure that teachers are aware of their responsibilities in relation to the education of students with SEN.
- Facilitate the creation within mainstream classes of an inclusive environment for students with SEN by making available appropriate information to teachers.
- Facilitate the continuous professional development of all members of staff in relation to the education of students with SEN.
- Ensure whole-school procedures are established to facilitate the effective involvement of parents in the student's education.
- Ensure parents are invited to share information regarding their child's special educational needs, and are consulted about how this information should be used in the best interests of their child.
- Ensure parents are involved in the preparation, implementation, progress and review of their child's education and ensure parents are fully aware of the school's procedures governing access to their child's records.

3. SEN Coordinator

The SEN Coordinator is responsible for managing, organising and monitoring Learning Support and Resource teaching under the direction of the Principal.

The SEN Coordinator:

- Is responsible for the development and implementation of a whole school policy for SEN, and for its on-going evaluation.

- Will provide assistance and advice, where possible, to colleagues dealing with students with SEN and assist them with the implementation of Education Programmes.
- Will assist in the implementation of a range of whole-school strategies designed to enhance learning and minimize difficulties.
- Will conduct an initial diagnostic assessment of each student who has been identified as having a learning difficulty and record the findings in the Individual Education Profile for each student.
- Will develop an Individual Education Profile for each student in consultation with parents.
- Will coordinate the implementation of whole-school procedures for the selection of students for supplementary teaching, giving consideration to: the selection criteria specified in the Learning-Support Policy, input from class teachers' and input from parents.
- Will consult with parents on a regular basis: for students with learning difficulties additional time should be given to parents in planning and discussing of their child's needs, including:
 - 1) Making parents aware of the concerns of the school about their child's progress.
 - 2) Outlining the school's practices regarding the administration of diagnostic tests and seek the approval of the parents to administer these assessments where appropriate.
 - 3) Making them aware of the type of support that their child will receive and how they can help to make it as effective as possible.
 - 4) Once diagnostic assessment has been undertaken, parents should be invited in to discuss the results and also to collaborate in a development of a progress profile.
- Will be responsible for the purchase of resources which are relevant to the learning support student.
- Will liaise with external agencies to arrange for educational assessments and provision for students with learning difficulties.
- Will meet with the Deputy Principal each week to discuss students' progress.
- Liaise closely with the class teacher and keep him/her informed of students in their class with learning difficulties and how they can best be helped in the classroom situation, as inclusion is all important for these students.
- Will facilitate the smooth transfer of students with SEN from primary to post-primary school and help to ensure a well-functioning formal communication structure between schools.
- Will liaise with the Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO)

4. Learning Support/Resource Teacher

The core task of LS/resource teacher is the teaching of students with special educational needs, this can be done:

- By being involved in team teaching with mainstream teachers in mainstream classes
- By withdrawing students for additional classes in literacy or numeracy as required on one-to-one or small group model

- By providing specific support for students with SEN in other areas such as the development of social skills

They will also be involved in providing additional teaching support to students experiencing difficulty with literacy and numeracy (scores below 10th percentile). The learning support teacher is also required to support students with difficulties in motor co-ordination, behaviour, socialisation, or language difficulties. This support can be provided on a small group basis, or team teaching within the mainstream class.

The learning support teacher should contribute to the development and implementation of whole-school policies and procedures in relation to the selection of students for supplementary teaching.

The LS/resource teacher is responsible for diagnostic assessment of students, following from this – programme planning i.e. developing, implementing and reviewing I.E.P.'s, consulting with parents and teachers and monitoring and evaluating students' progress. Also

- Coordinating and implementing whole school policies
- Compiling and updating data on students with SEN and working with senior management in ensuring that the statutory obligations of the school are met
- Communication and collaboration with outside agencies and professionals

The LS/resource teacher should engage in formal and informal assessment of SEN students by:

- Liaising with the guidance counsellor and other staff members in relation to the selection and implementation of tests and other means for assessing student's achievement and progress
- Co-ordinate the gathering of information for I.E.P.'s
- Implementation of I.E.P.'s and review of progress of students
- Support and advice to mainstream teachers as required with regard to differentiation, selection and implementation of appropriate means of assessments
- Work with Career Guidance department in terms of testing and providing advice for students who may require reasonable accommodations in state exams
- Give advice on appropriate means of linking assessment and teaching.

5. Subject Teacher

Teachers should make every effort to ensure that student with special educational needs are fully involved in all aspects of classroom activity.

- The teacher has responsibility for ensuring that all students, including those with SEN are provided with a learning programme and environment that enables them to gain access to the curriculum and to advance their learning.
- They have a central role in identifying a student who may be at risk and referring this student to the SEN co-ordinator for appropriate screening.
- The class teacher should create a supportive, caring environment for students with SEN through which these students are affirmed in their ability to learn and to participate generally in the life of the school.
- Teaching should be differentiated as required in order to meet individual needs. The class teacher should collaborate with and seek advice and assistance from members of the SEN team in planning for differentiation

- The class teacher should make themselves aware of the special educational needs of students in their classes and contribute, as appropriate, to the setting of learning targets.
- The class teacher can contribute to the review of I.E.P.'s by providing information on students' progress by collaborating with the SEN team.
- Mainstream teachers can contribute to school development planning for students with SEN through strategic planning at the subject department level within the school.
- The class teacher is advised to consider the needs of students with SEN when selecting books, planning and teaching classes, setting homework, and setting assessments.
- To support the learning-support teacher in any withdrawal work necessary.

Differentiation

With regard to teaching students with low achievement/ability, the following approach may be implemented:

Differentiated instruction is a means by which teachers can create an inclusive and supported learning environment for all students. It acknowledges that students learn at different rates and in different ways. The following general approaches are recommended:

- Setting learning objectives for students with SEN at an appropriate level
- Provide learning activities and resources that are suitably challenging and are also likely to result in success and progress
- Modify presentation, questioning techniques, style of questioning etc. in order to maximise the involvement of students with SEN
- Relate the topic to life experiences or concrete examples
- Allow alternative formats for answering questions i.e. orally, typing etc.
- Set up paired learning systems in the class to involve more able students working with SEN students either in collaborative groups or in peer-tutoring arrangements
- Provide learning activities which will ensure success for these students, as fostering self-esteem and confidence is critical for such students.

6. Parents

Parents can make a huge contribution to their child's learning programme. They can prepare for and support the work of the school by:

- Providing all relevant information and documentation to the school in relation to their child's learning difficulties, learning needs, strengths, and any other concerns they may have. This information will enable the school to begin to plan for the inclusive education of their child. The provision of documentation to the school regarding their child's needs is critical to collaborative planning for their child.
- Communicating freely with the class teacher at any time if they are concerned about their child's education. Parents help the school by keeping teachers informed of their progress of their child, or any difficulties they encounter.
- Providing a home environment where there are opportunities for learning.
- Supporting the work of the school by participating with their child in the following activities:

1. Paired reading

2. Helping them with their homework
3. Using ICTs where available to support learning in English and Mathematics
4. Implementing suggested home-based activities outlined in their child's Individual Profile and discussing the outcomes with the child's teachers.

It is very important that parents talk positively about school and school work.

Parents should keep the class teacher informed of the progress that they observe in their child's learning. They should also let the school know of any learning difficulties that they observe in their child at home. If following diagnostic assessment, the child needs learning support, the parent should attend a meeting with the learning support teacher to discuss:

1. The results of the assessment
2. Learning targets set for the student
3. The way that these targets can be supported at home.

If it is decided to discontinue learning support as the targets have been met, parents need to discuss with their child's teachers how the child's future learning needs can continue to be met at school and at home.

If learning support is to be continued for another instructional term, it is necessary for the parents to meet with the learning support teacher to discuss revised targets and how they can help at home to implement them.

7. Students

Students receiving learning-support should:

- Have a positive attitude towards supplementary teaching.
- Become familiar with their learning targets, short-term and long-term and they should also be involved in the setting of these targets.
- Contribute to the selection of material relevant to the attainment of these targets.
- Participate fully in all assessments.
- Develop ownership of the skills and strategies that are taught during learning support classes and learn to apply these to improve their own learning.

8. Guidance Counsellors

The Guidance Counsellors are core members of the SEN team and should assist other members of the team in promoting the inclusion of students with SEN in the school. They should:

- Provide individualised guidance and support for students with SEN and involving parents as required
- Assist students at different stages of school life in making correct subject choices and career decisions. It is important that the Guidance Counsellor facilitates the SEN student in setting realistic career goals
- Collaborate in the assessment process with the SEN team
- Encourage the personal and social development of the student including vocational preparation i.e. interview skills, work experience etc.
- Consult with parents and staff
- Assist with referrals to other professionals and agencies
- Work closely with year heads and the SEN team to identify students needing support
- Advise Sen students on subject choice and subject load
- liaise with students, parents and the SEN team in relation to DARE applications

9. Special Needs Assistants (SNA)

The role of the Special Needs Assistant is cited in Circular 07/02. They are allocated to schools to provide care assistance to students with SEN. The duties of the SNA's are assigned by the principal. Their work is supervised by the SEN coordinator.

- The SNA are recruited specifically to assist schools in providing the necessary nonteaching services to students with assessed educational needs
- They provide a valuable contribution to the capacity of the school to provide inclusive education for students with SEN
- They should work closely with class teachers in providing assistance to students with SEN, for example in the areas of personal care, supporting mobility and health and safety
- They may provide assistance with clothing, feeding, toileting and general hygiene if and when it may be required
- The SNA may be required to provide special assistance as necessary for students with particular difficulties e.g. helping SEN students with note-taking
- They may provide assistance on out of school trips
- SNA's are expected to treat all matters relating to school business and their work in the school as strictly confidential
- They may provide assistance during house exams
- They may provide general assistance to the subject teacher, under the direction of the principal. SNA's may not act as a substitute teacher. In no circumstances may they be left in sole charge of a class or group of student.
- They will participate in school development planning, where appropriate, and cooperate with any developments which arise from the school development process.
- The SNAs may be re-assigned to other appropriate when SEN students are absent or when particularly urgent work demand arises.

10. Year Heads

Year Heads are assigned to year groups and follow with their group usually from 1st yr through to 6th yr. In this regard they have a special knowledge of the students in their care. The Year Head should:

- support a culture of inclusion in the school
- facilitate the inclusion of SEN students by monitoring the students' progress within the year group

Assessment

Assessment should always be for a particular purpose. In Mountrath Community School assessment is used for the following purposes:

- To inform planning and appropriate teaching and learning
- To evaluate student progress
- To establish a baseline in relation to a student's attainments in literacy and numeracy
- To identify students for learning support
- To inform consultations with outside agencies i.e. NEP's CAMHS etc.

Methods of assessment

a). Formal Assessment

Standardised assessments enables the SEN department to obtain a general indication of a student's ability and to interpret the student's level of attainment and ability by reference to the performance of other students in the same age range or class level. Students enrolling in our school undertake a formal assessment. The following formal assessments are carried out in the school:

- The **Cognitive Abilities Test (CAT4)** is a diagnostic assessment that is designed to help students and their teachers understand how they learn and what their academic potential might be. It assesses how students think in areas that are known to make a difference to learning. This assessment is given to students prior to entry.
- The **Wide Range Achievement Test – 4th Edition (WRAT-IV)** is an assessment of attainments in Literacy, namely: Word Reading, Reading Comprehension, Spelling and Numeracy. Students seeking Reasonable Accommodations in State Exams, are assessed initially on the WRAT –IV before an application is made. Students referred by class teachers who may be presenting with difficulties are assessed on the WRATIV before intervention or being referred to outside agencies i.e. NEPS
- Handwriting speed tests

b). Informal Assessment

Informal methods of assessment include:

- classroom tests
- informal observations by the teacher
- evaluation of written work
- informal analysis of students' language and social development

c). Information Gathering

- The SEN coordinator and guidance counsellors liaise with primary schools regarding all incoming first year students with regards to their areas of need
- Primary school provides reports on each student to the secondary school
- The SEN coordinator attends meetings with the primary school principal or class teacher, the parent(s) of incoming student, and in some cases, the NEPS psychologist assigned to the school.
- The enrolment application form requests parents to notify the school regarding any possible special educational need. This has no bearing on the child's right of entry but is used to identify a possible need as early as practicable. It is requested also that any formal reports or assessments by outside agencies is furnished with the application form.
- The special needs coordinator liaises with parents and appropriate external agencies in the event of a possible special need being identified.

d). Diagnostic Assessment

Diagnostic assessment can be carried out by formal or informal methods of assessment. The purpose of this is to identify the student's learning strengths and needs. It is carried out in preparation for the development of an Individual Educational Plan (I.E.P.) for each individual student with needs and may:

- Focus on literacy, numeracy, social needs, behavioural issues, learning strengths, and learning needs;
- Provide information of a student's knowledge and learning style;
- Inform planning of I.E.P. with regard to discussion with the student, parents, and other relevant personnel with regard to the setting of learning targets and objectives for a student;
- Results of assessments: As policy we do not disclose entrance test results to parents. However, where a concern arises, parents are contacted and student's individual needs are discussed.

Students applying to class groups other than first year, must also complete an application form and supply all the relevant documentation regarding any previous resource or learning support received. Any Psychological, Educational or Medical Assessments must also be supplied.

Models of SEN provision

In designing the most suitable support for students with SEN the following options are considered:

- Curricular differentiation
- Team teaching/co-operative teaching
- Learning support class
- In class support
- Inclusion of SNA in specific classes
- Individual withdrawal
- Curricular reduction – a student with SEN who experiences difficulty with the breadth of the curriculum may have the option of reducing the number of subjects taken. This is a decision arrived at only when all other avenues have been exhausted. A consultation process between all parties is necessary in order to fully ascertain the impact this will have on progress and option accessibility in later years.

Learning Support Class

At Mountrath Community School in order to best support students with SEN we offer a Support Class for Junior Cycle. This class has a lower pupil/teacher ratio, follows a slightly reduced curriculum and students are significantly supported in the school. The students attend some subject lessons as a small class group but join with all other students for practical /option classes.

The results of the Cognitive Attainment Test, the information received from the primary schools and from the application form help the SEN department to compile a profile of each student. From this profile a list of students that may require additional supports is drawn up. More information is gathered from primary school personnel when staff from M.C.S. visit the primary schools. The SEN and Career Guidance departments identify students that may benefit from partaking in a Support Class.

Parents are contacted at this point to offer places in this class and the full implications are discussed.

Exemptions from the study of Irish

- Where a student was granted an exemption in primary school the onus is on the parents/guardian to provide written proof at the time of applying to the school for a place.
- Incoming first years with Irish exemptions are noted.
- Exemptions from Irish are sought where appropriate. Please refer to Circular 0053/2019. The guidelines set down by the Department of Education and Skills will be strictly adhered to.
- The school will consider granting an exemption from Irish when a written request is made by the parents/guardians and the school is furnished with a copy of a psychological report not more than two years old or other supporting documentation recommending the exemption.
- Please note that DES exemptions can only be sought for the exemption from the study of Irish. There is no automatic right or entitlement to the exemption of any other language (the only exception to this is LCA MFL)
- Where possible, withdrawal for Learning Support is arranged for students with SEN who do not study Irish during Irish time.

Curricular Modification

Students who have an exemption from Irish due to Dyslexia or general learning difficulty have access to learning support during timetabled Irish classes.

Releases from French/German are considered on an individual basis in consultation with parents/guardians, the subject teacher, SEN coordinator, the guidance counsellor and the principal.

Other curricular modifications are considered for individual students when deemed absolutely necessary. Consultation between all relevant parties is deemed essential when making such decisions.

The timetabled periods which become available due to such curricular modifications will be used, where possible, to implement individual resource interventions and learning support.

Reasonable Accommodations in State Examinations

Applications are made by the SEN team for all SEN students deemed in need of Reasonable Accommodations for Certificate Examinations (RACE). The procedures as directed by the Department of Education and Skills and the State Examinations Commission will be strictly adhered to. Accommodations are granted by the SEC.

These accommodations apply to the SEC Junior and Leaving Certificate Examinations. Applications for the Junior Certificate are processed in 3rd Year and the Leaving Certificate applications are processed at the beginning of 6th Year.

From 2016 onwards the SEC now operates a devolved model of RA for both Junior cycle and Leaving certificate. The school will make an application for relevant accommodation for students who meet the criteria as laid down by the SEC at junior cycle and these accommodations can be reactivated at senior cycle when the school is satisfied that the student still has a need for the accommodation. Further details can be accessed at www.examinations.ie

At senior cycle the SEN team will assess the SEN students accessing support in the school and will make an application for Leaving Certificate RA based on information accessible to them. Should a student present for SEN at senior cycle (having never accessed any SEN provision in the school prior to presenting for a RA application) then, in order to expedite the process, the SEN team may request that the student brings supporting documentation with recent scores to the SEN team for consideration.

Where resources permit and when it is deemed appropriate, accommodations may be made available to students who qualify for such accommodations at house exams and mock exams.

Communication

Staff Meetings

At staff meeting at the beginning of the school year the SEN team inform all staff of students with learning disabilities and what support will be available for teachers when dealing with these students.

School Administration System:

Any information regarding SEN students will be posted on their individual profile on the school Admin system. Here teachers will have access to pertinent information on their students in order to deliver informed tuition.

Review

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis or more frequently depending on the legislative changes which are ongoing in this area.