

# **Special Educational Needs Policy**

## **Our Lady's Secondary School Templermore**

### **Introduction**

In its Mission Statement, Our Lady's commits itself to providing "a caring, safe and disciplined environment in which all students are challenged and supported to reach their educational and personal potential." The school believes that all children and young adults should be valued equally irrespective of any individual needs or differences and is committed to making effective provision in its educational programme for those students in the school who have learning support/special educational needs. The school is committed to raising standards and helping all students derive the maximum benefit from their education at Our Lady's. The CEIST charter describes the Catholic School as "an inclusive community ideally built on love and formed by the interaction and collaboration of its various components: students, teachers, parents/guardians, non – teaching staff and members of the Board." Accordingly the school operates an open admissions' policy and all staff are fully committed to supporting and nurturing students and co-operating with their families and other agencies involved in their education and welfare.

The following policy should be read in conjunction with other related school policies including the school's Admissions Policy, Pastoral Care Policy, Guidance Policy, Code of Behaviour, SPHE and Anti-Bullying policies.

### **The Legislative Context**

The Epsen Act (2004) defines Special Educational Needs as follows:

“ ‘Special Educational Needs’ means, in relation to a person, a restriction in the capacity of that 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”.

Earlier the Education Act (1998) defined Special Educational Needs as “the educational needs of students who have a disability and the educational needs of exceptionally able students”.

At Our Lady's, we are committed, in so far as is practicable, to catering for the educational needs of the range of students included in both the above definitions as well as the needs of students for whom English is not a first language, and students whose special needs arise from from economic, social or emotional disadvantage.

This Special Educational Needs Policy is drafted in the context of the specific provisions and definitions with regard to students with disabilities and special educational needs, and the statutory requirements placed on schools, Board of Management and the Department of Education and Science by the following:

The Data Protection Acts (1988, 1998, and 2003)  
The Freedom of Information Acts (1997 and 2003)  
The Education Act 1998  
The Education Welfare Act (2000)  
The Equal Status Act (2000) and the Equality Act (2004)  
The Education for Persons With Disabilities Bill (2003)  
The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004)  
Other relevant Oireachtas Legislation and International Agreements.

### **Aims and Principles**

The following aims and principles provide the rationale for Our Lady's Special Educational Needs Policy:

1. To foster a whole-school, inclusive and integrated approach to provision for Special Educational Needs students that ensures that these students have access to, participate in and benefit from an education suitable to their needs at Our Lady's.
2. To ensure that students with learning support/special educational needs are identified and provided for in a fair and equitable manner so that their learning potential and their sense of self-worth and dignity are developed and respected.
3. To ensure that all members of staff are aware of the learning support/special educational needs of students and of their own role in meeting the educational needs of these students.
4. To ensure that students with special educational needs are offered a broad, balanced, relevant, progressive, continuous and differentiated curriculum and that they are provided for in an inclusive way.
5. To develop students' self esteem, confidence and feelings of achievement and fulfilment in accordance with the school's Mission Statement and related policies.
6. To assist staff with the educational management of students with special educational needs where appropriate.
7. To encourage and foster positive partnership with parents/guardians in order to achieve appropriate support and co-operation in meeting the educational needs of students with Special Educational Needs.
8. To provide regular reports to parents/guardians on the progress of students with Special Educational Needs.
9. To liaise with all appropriate agencies for the provision of required resources (including staff, funding and materials) to meet the educational needs of all students with special educational needs.
10. To co-operate with relevant agencies in the preparation of programmes of education for students with special educational needs.

11. To ensure the effective and efficient use of resources.
12. To promote ongoing professional development among staff in the area of Special Educational Needs including the use of Assistive Technology in the area of Special Needs.

### **School Details**

To be truly inclusive each school must reflect the community it serves. Among other imperatives this involves the inclusion of students with special educational needs. Our Lady's is a co-educational voluntary secondary school which operates an open admissions' policy. As the only provider of secondary education in the town, the school caters for a diverse student population. In pursuit of inclusive values the school strives to create a secure, accepting, collaborating and stimulating community in which everyone is valued and where every student is encouraged to achieve to the highest degree possible according to his/her potential.

- The school operates a system of mixed ability teaching. At enrolment in first year all students are allocated to mixed ability classes.
- The school aims to maximise the participation, in a meaningful way, of students with special educational needs in mainstream classes.
- The school's award systems is used to promote excellence in all areas of school life including behaviour and co-operation in class, academic excellence, willingness, initiative, and enterprise, sustained improvement in attitude/performance and good citizenship.
- Students with special educational needs are withdrawn in small groups or individually for special educational support.
- Withdrawal is usually, though not exclusively, from Irish and modern language classes.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

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

1. To ensure that the school has a comprehensive learning support/special educational needs policy in place that has been developed collaboratively with all the relevant partners, to monitor the implementation of that policy and to ensure its evaluation.
2. To ensure that a broad, balanced, relevant and progressive curriculum is provided in the school.
3. To ensure that necessary resources are sought on behalf of students with special educational needs.
4. To ensure that the learning support/special educational needs policy forms part of the School Plan.

### **The Principal/Deputy Principal**

1. The Principal has responsibility for all aspects of the day-to-day management of policy and provision for students with Special Educational Needs
2. To appoint learning support/special educational needs co-ordinators from among the teaching staff and to work closely with the co-ordinators .
3. To keep the Board of Management informed regarding issues of relevance to Learning Support/SEN.
4. In consultation with the the Learning Support/Special Educational Needs co-ordinators to liaise with the Department of Education and Science and other outside agencies.
5. To ensure the effective and efficient use of resources including the allocation of hours and funds.

### **Learning Support/Special Needs Co-ordinator**

1. To oversee the day-to-day operation of the school's Learning Support/Special Needs Policy and to work closely with and under the direction of the school Principal.
2. To assist with assessment of incoming first year students.
3. To engage in personal professional development.
4. To liaise with and advise other teachers.
5. To meet regularly with the Learning Support/ Special Educational Needs team, the Guidance Counsellor, Special Needs Assistants, and other relevant personnel.
6. To oversee the records of students with Learning Support/ Special Educational Needs.
7. To liaise with parents/guardians of students with Learning Support/ special educational needs.
8. To contribute to the in-service and training of staff.
9. To oversee, in co-operation with school management, the distribution of suitable learning resources and teaching aids.
10. To liaise with external agencies including primary schools, NEPS, and the HSE.
11. To ensure that Individual Education Plans are in place, as required, and to develop other practices to facilitate the identification of students with Learning Support/Special Educational Needs.
12. To apply to the State Examination Commission for Reasonable Accommodation and exemptions where appropriate.
13. To draw up the Learning Support/ Special Educational Needs Policy in conjunction with general teaching staff.

## **Learning Support and Resource Teachers**

1. The Learning Support Team in 2009 includes Josefa O'Dwyer (co-ordinator), Emma Fogarty, Rory Purcell and Seán Johnston
2. Learning Support teachers provide diagnostic testing, monitoring and advice to teachers, students and parents/guardians as well as direct teaching for students who have learning support needs.
3. Resource and learning support teachers are responsible in consultation with other relevant agencies and individuals for the development and delivery of Individual Education Plans.

## **Special Needs Assistants**

Special Needs Assistants work closely with the Learning Support/ Special Educational Needs co-ordinators and the individual subject teachers in the implementation of the school's policy as it relates to individual students or groups of students. In particular SNA's play a very important role in the health and safety of the students and in their social and emotional development.

## **Special Needs Assistants duties include the following:**

1. Special assistance as necessary for students with particular difficulties, for example, helping special needs students with typing, writing, computers and the use of equipment.
2. Provide assistance to students to enable them to access safely all areas of the school building.
3. To provide assistance to students to enable them to access the curriculum.
4. Assisting on out-of-school visits, walks, examinations and similar activities.
5. Assisting the teacher with in the supervision of students during assembly, recreation, dispersal from the classroom for one reason or another.
6. General assistance to the class teachers including assistance with the health and safety needs of students.
7. Participation in School Development Planning.
8. Engagement with parents/guardians of special needs students in both formal and informal structures as required.
9. Preparation and organisation of classrooms.
10. Accompanying individual students who may have to be withdrawn from the classroom for one reason or another.
11. Liaise with staff and school management regarding student progress.

### **The General Teaching Staff**

1. To make provision for students with Learning Support/ Special Needs in their classes and subject areas.
2. To inform the Learning Support teacher when a student is presenting with a learning difficulty.
3. To accept an aural version of completed examinations and some homework assignments for correction.
4. To provide the Learning Support co-ordinator with completed examination scripts/class tests when required.
5. To be familiar with Educational Assessments and other relevant reports and materials in relation to students with Learning Support / Special Educational needs in their classes.
6. To be part of a whole school approach in relation to literacy and numeracy.
7. To develop a positive ethos in the classroom for fostering an inclusive approach to meeting the social, emotional, behavioural and educational needs of Special Educational Needs students.
8. To identify training needs and to secure training where needed.
9. To liaise with the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators .

### **Parents'/Guardians' – Involvement and Support**

1. To work in positive partnership with the school and other agencies
2. To support and encourage their child in her/his education.
3. Parental permission will be sought before a child is offered Learning Support.
4. Contact with parents/guardians will be made by telephone, letter, e-mail, or in person. Normally the relevant Learning Support/ Resource person will make the initial contact. Letters will be jointly signed by the Learning Support/ Special Educational Needs teacher and the Principal.
5. To co-operate with the school in the writing of Individual Education Plans for students.

### **Identification of Students with Learning Support/ Special Educational Needs**

The school aims to identify as soon as possible difficulties that can be supported, or special needs that require adapted intervention. The school has in place a number of programmes including its induction and Cairdeas programmes to ensure smooth and effective transfer of of studets with Special Educational Needs from Primary Schools. A smooth and effective transfer of pertinent information with regard to each individual's special needs ensures that each student is provided with the relevant supports.

The identification and selection process will usually involve the following:

- Data collected from subject teachers and primary school teachers.
- Educational Assessments and other relevant reports.
- AH2 and Cognitive Ability Tests for students at entry.
- Self-referral by students.
- Results of class tests/end of term assessments.
- Perceived likelihood of early school leaving
- Emotional/ Psychological condition in the child.
- Wishes of parents/guardians.

### **Assessments**

The school expects that students will be assessed as follows:

- Standardised diagnostic testing on entry to the school
- Referral to the National Educational Psychological Services as appropriate.
- Parental consent must be sought for Psychological Assessments.
- Assessment through teaching in general subject areas.
- Follow up assessments and testing.
- Original records of such assessments shall be maintained in the school in the Learning Support Room.

### **Materials**

Information Pack and Resource Pack for Secondary School Teachers of Students with Special Educational Needs ( Dr. Mary Nugent, NEPS).

Grammar Books, Cloze Tests, Comprehension Books, High Interest- Low reading age novels, TEFL books, Handwriting books. Laptops with Read& Write Gold, Clicker 5, Wordshark 4, Numbershark 4. Flash Cards, Access to resources on SESS website and NCCA website, DVDs, CDs etc. Student textbooks from mainstream classes.

## **Programmes of work for individual students and groups**

Resource teachers and Learning Support teachers will concentrate on the following topics:

### **Literacy:**

1. Phonics
2. Grammar
3. Cloze-tests
4. Comprehension
5. Prediction
6. Reading –High interest low reading age novels
7. Word-Attack Skills
8. Vocabulary – Flash Cards
9. Handwriting
10. Spelling
11. Shared Reading
12. Basic language and communication skill with newcomer students.
13. Support with class work – mainly for Second and Third Year Students.

### **Numeracy:**

1. Addition
2. Subtraction
3. Multiplication
4. Division
5. Support with class work

### **Use of ICT**

Where possible use is made of assistive technology in the teaching of Special Educational Needs Students. Twelve teachers have recently completed a course in assistive technology and programmes like “Read and Write Gold”, “Inspiration” etc will be used when teaching Students with Special Educational Needs.

### **Welfare of Special Needs Students**

The school acknowledges the need to create a climate and culture which focuses upon respect, tolerance and the acceptance of diversity. The responsibilities of all students and staff in relation to Bullying and Harassment are outlined in the school’s Anti- Bullying and SPHE policies.

### **Procedures for the development of individual education plans**

The Education for People with Special Needs Act (EPSEN) 2004 provides for the provision of Individual Education Plans (IEP) for students with special educational needs. In preparing the IEP the Principal must ensure that the parents, Area Special Education Needs Organiser (S.E.N.O.) and other appropriate people are consulted. Individual Education Plans are not as yet a legal requirement. Their implementation has been delayed pending the provision of adequate funding and training for personnel involved. However, the school is committed to the provision of



Individual Education Plans for students with special educational needs, as far as possible, subject to the limitations of time and resources.

***Procedures for the writing of Individual Education Plans :***

- Application forms, relevant reports, assessments etc are collected and reviewed.
- Consultation is conducted with relevant parties including, primary school teachers, SENO, parents/guardians, subject teachers Special Educational Needs co-ordinator and the special educational needs student.
- A plan is formulated with a view supporting the special educational needs student in the school
- The plan includes the following: student details, summary of assessments and recommendations, strengths, learning needs, targets to be reached in one year. Proposed date for review of plan.

***The specific content of the plan will include the following:***

- The nature and degree of the student's abilities, skills and talents.
- The nature and degree of the student's special educational needs and how those needs affect her educational development.
- The present level of educational performance of the student.
- The special educational needs of the student.
- The special education and related support services to be provided to the student to enable the student to benefit from education and to participate in the life of the school.
- The I.E.P. must be reviewed at regular intervals and at least once a year. (see appendix for I.E.P. template)

***Exceptionally Able Students***

The school aims to make provision for exceptionally able students in the following ways:

- Class teachers, through differentiation will provide relevant materials and challenges for exceptionally able students.
- The school's merit system rewards excellence in all areas of school life.
- Exceptionally able students will be provided with information on programmes for exceptionally gifted and talented students at UL, DCU and elsewhere.

### Transfer to Adult and Working Life

Effective transfer of students with SEN to adult and working life is effected in a number of ways:

- Students of LCA and TY establish links with the world of work and with local employers through the work placement modules of these courses.
- The school's guidance counsellor meets all senior cycle students individually and helps to identify training schemes, third level courses and suitable career opportunities for students with Special Educational Needs.
- Assistance is given to SEN students where necessary to complete College and Job application forms.
- Information sessions and visiting speakers provide details of FETAC courses in Colleges of Further Education.

### Links with outside agencies

The Learning Support Department will liaise, as required, subject to legal restrictions, with various statutory and non-statutory bodies, which may include the following:

1. Primary Schools
2. Social Services
3. G.P's
4. Health Boards
5. Juvenile Liaison Officer
6. Gardai
7. Dyslexia Association (ACLD) – Branches in Cashel and Nenagh.
8. County Library Services
9. National Educational Psychological Services, NEPS
10. Speech and language Therapists
11. N.C.S.E./S.E.N.O's
12. Reading Association and Learning Support Association of Ireland
13. National Behavioural Support Service
14. Special Education Support Service

### Professional Development

1. This school will endeavour to provide all teaching staff in general and S.E.N. staff in particular with opportunities for professional development for example in-services in relevant areas where required.
2. The school encourages membership of I.L.S.A., I.A.T.S.E. and other relevant organisations and encourages attendance at courses, seminars and conferences.
3. From time to time the school organises in-house professional development in special educational needs teaching for all teachers or groups of teachers involved in a particular aspect of special educational needs delivery.

This policy was drafted in consultation with staff, parents/guardians and teachers and it was ratified by the Board of Management on 13 October 2008.

