

# **Dunshaughlin Community College**

## **Special Educational Needs Policy**

### **Rationale**

The purpose of this policy document is to provide a set of guidelines, for achieving objectives, which is enacted through a process or procedure as part of a systematic way of working with children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). The policy is underpinned by the school philosophy on SEN and inclusivity. It outlines broad guidelines on what should be done, practical details of how this will be achieved and how we monitor what has been achieved. Policy should be viewed as 'evolving' and should take account of changes as they happen. SEN are an integral part of the whole-school environment and considered part of 'normal' pedagogy and learning in both the classroom and general school.

### **School Mission Statement**

'We are committed to the provision of a complete education maximising student potential to the highest possible standards through a highly committed staff in a modern well equipped college. We strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect in a happy, caring, supportive but challenging and well structured environment.

A demanding environment can also be a caring environment.'

### **Aims**

All students should have access to an education which considers and plans for their individual specific learning needs and abilities. This includes access to a broad and balanced curriculum including extra-curricular activities as appropriate and full access to the National Curriculum. We aim to facilitate access for all our students to activities commensurate with their capabilities and compatible with the education of students with Special Education Needs and the efficient use of resources.

### **Objectives**

- To identify children's individual needs at the earliest possible stage so as to make provision for their needs thus raising their attainment levels.
- To work in close partnership with, and involve parents/guardians of children who have special educational needs.
- To involve children, parents/guardians in the identification and review of 'targets', that are specific, achievable, realistic and time-related.
- To liaise with appropriate outside agencies, to support the needs and provision for children who have special educational needs.

### **Team**

The 'Special Needs Team' comprises of School Principal & Deputy Principal, Special Needs Coordinator, Learning Support Teachers, Resource Teachers and Special Needs Assistants. School Guidance Counsellors have an important role in liaising with Special Needs Coordinator. The Special

Needs Coordinator is responsible for managing and organising and monitoring Learning support and Resource teaching under the direction of the Principal.

### **Legislative framework**

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 the policy.

### **Special Educational Needs (SEN)**

Children have special educational needs if they encounter or are likely to encounter ‘barriers to learning’ in normal 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.
- They have a disorder, physical or sensory disability which prevents them from using educational facilities provided in school for children of the same age.

### **Inclusive School**

‘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 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
- Pupils 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, there are students who are in the realm of ‘gifted’ and have therefore special needs which should be provided for in school policy and practice.

### **School Structure**

Dunshaughlin Community College is operated under the Vocational Education system. The school has a Board of Management which is a sub-committee of Co. Meath VEC and is comprised of:

- Representatives of Co Meath VEC (3)
- Staff representatives (2)
- Parent representatives (2)
- Local community representatives (2)
- Representative from parish (1)
- CEO from Co. Meath VEC
- School Principal (Secretary to Board)

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

1. School Management Authority – VEC and Board of Management
2. School Principal
3. Special Needs Coordinator
4. Resource/Learning Support teacher
5. General/Classroom teachers
6. Parents
7. Students
8. Guidance Counsellors
9. Special Needs Assistant

### **1. School Management Authority – VEC & Board of Management**

The VEC and Board of Management have an important role in overseeing the development, monitoring and review of school policy. The Board should liaise with the VEC to secure the best possible learning environment for students - i.e. provision of appropriate accommodation and teaching resources to facilitate all SEN requirements.

- Oversee the development, implementation and review of the Learning-Support policy.
- Support the Principal and all the staff in their professional assessments of, and provision provided for, pupils with Special Educational Needs.
- To facilitate quality provision for pupils with Special Needs, by aiming to secure the best possible environment for these pupils.

### **2. School Principal**

*“The Principal teacher has overall responsibility for the school’s learning-support programme and for the operation of services for children with special educational needs”.*  
(Learning-Support Guidelines, P.38).

#### The Principal Teacher 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 pupils 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 pupils with very low achievement and learning difficulties so that these pupils can be provided with the support they need.
- Encourage teachers to increase their knowledge and skills in the area of learning-support, in particular class teachers who may have little knowledge of the disabilities that these students have or the difficulties they may have in trying to follow the curriculum.
- 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 pupils in receipt of learning support is provided.
- Monitor the selection of pupils who are selected for learning-support and ensuring that the students are receiving adequate supplementary teaching.
- Liaise with external agencies such as psychological services to arrange assessments and special provision for students with special needs.
- Maintain a list of students who are receiving learning-support.
- Liaise regularly with the learning-support teacher.
- Meet with parents of pupils 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 mainstream 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 mainstream teachers.
- Mainstream teachers may also require advice and training opportunities to enable them to address the individual needs of students, including contributing to the development of an I.E.P.
- 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 their children'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
- Ensure parents are fully aware of the school's procedures governing access to their child's records.

### **3. Special Needs Coordinator**

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

### **The Special Needs Coordinator:**

- Be responsible for the development and implementation of a whole school policy for Special Educational Needs, and for its on-going evaluation.
- To provide assistance and advice, where possible, to colleagues dealing with pupils with Special Needs and to assist them with the implementation of Education Plans.
- Assist in the implementation of a range of whole-school strategies designed to enhance learning and prevent difficulties.
- Conduct an initial diagnostic assessment of each pupil who has been identified as having a learning difficulty and record the findings in the Individual Education Profile for each student.
- Development of an Individual Education Profile for each pupil in consultation with parents.
- Maintaining a monthly plan and progress record, for each student receiving supplementary teaching in relation to the attainment of agreed learning targets and record this in the students Individual plan.
- Coordinating the implementation of whole-school procedures for the selection of pupils for supplementary teaching, giving consideration to: the selection criteria specified in the Learning-Support Policy, input from class teachers' and input from parents.
- 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:
  1. Make parents aware of the concerns of the school about their child's progress.
  2. Outline the school's practices regarding the administration of diagnostic tests and seek the approval of the parents to administer these assessments where appropriate.
  3. Make 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 the development in an individual education profile.
- Be responsible for the purchase of resources which are relevant to the learning-support student.
- Liaising with external agencies to arrange for educational assessments and provision for students with learning difficulties.
- Meet with the Principal each month to discuss each 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.
- Facilitate the smooth transfer of students with SEN from primary to post-primary school. Ensure a well functioning formal communication structure between schools.
- Liaise closely with the Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO)

### **4. Resource Teacher**

- Core task of 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 and life skills
- Co-ordination and implementation of whole school policies
- Compiling and updating data on students with SEN and working with school management in ensuring that the statutory obligations of the school are met
- Communication and collaboration with outside agencies and professionals
- The 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 or 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 counsellor in terms of testing and providing advice for students who may require reasonable accommodations in state exams
  - Advice on appropriate means of linking assessment and teaching.

### **Learning Support Teacher**

- The primary role of the learning support teacher is to provide additional teaching support to students experiencing difficulty with literacy and numeracy (scores below 10<sup>th</sup> 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 learning support teacher is responsible for diagnostic assessment of students, following from this – programme planning i.e. developing, implementing and reviewing I.E.P.'s
- Consultation with parents and teachers
- Monitoring and evaluating students' progress

### **5. Mainstream Teacher**

Teachers should make every effort to ensure that children with special educational needs are fully involved in all aspects of 'life in the class'.

- The mainstream 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 in the students I.E.P.
- 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 'buddy' learning systems in the class to involve more able students working with those with SEN 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 these 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:

- The school encourages open communication between parents and staff throughout every pupil's education at Dunshaughlin Community College.
- Provide 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.
- Parents play a critical role in the successful implementation of each child's I.E.P.
- Parents are encouraged to communicate 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.
- Provision of 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**

Pupils 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 Counsellor is a core member of the SEN team and should assist other members of the team in promoting the inclusion of students with SEN in the school
- 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
- Personal and social development
- Referrals to other professionals and agencies
- Vocational preparation i.e. interview skills, work experience etc

## **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 non-teaching 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, health and safety
- Assistance with clothing, feeding, toileting and general hygiene may be required
- The SNA may be required to provide special assistance as necessary for children with particular difficulties e.g. helping SEN students with note-taking
- 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
- 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 children.

### **Assessment**

Assessment should always be for a particular purpose. In Dunshaughlin Community College, 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 student for learning support
- To inform consultations with outside agencies i.e. NEP's
- To ensure a true mixed ability class setting

### **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. Every student

enrolling in the school undertakes a formal assessment. The following formal assessments are carried out in the school:

- The Non-Readers Intelligence Test (NRIQ) gives the school an indication of the students' cognitive level of ability on entry;
- The Wide Range Achievement Test – 4<sup>th</sup> 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 WRAT-IV before intervention or being referred to outside agencies i.e. NEPS

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
- Students enrolling in the school sit a Non-Standardised test in English, Irish and Mathematics to help identify students level of attainments in these subjects, and to identify students who may require extra support at an early stage. It also helps to inform mixed ability class groups

c). Information Gathering

- Special needs coordinator liaises with primary schools regarding all incoming first year students with regards to their areas of need
- Primary schools provide results of standardised tests i.e. Drumcondra Reading, Spelling, and Maths tests
- Primary school provide reports on each student to the secondary school
- The SEN coordinator attends transfer meetings with the primary school principal, class teacher, parent 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.
- 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;
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### Staff Meetings

A staff meeting should be held at the beginning of the school year to inform all staff of students with learning disabilities and what support will be available for teachers when dealing with these students.

### **Implementation of policy**

*The role of supporting learning is a collaborative responsibility shared by all.*

The Board of Management, Principal Teacher, Class Teachers, Learning-Support/Resource Teacher, Special Needs Coordinator, Parents and Children are all stakeholders and contribute to implementation and monitoring of special educational needs policy.

The Board of Management has overall responsibility for the provision of education to all students, including students with Special Educational Needs. They facilitate the inclusion of students with SEN through inclusive enrolment policies and by promoting inclusive whole-school policies and procedures.

Under current legislation the principal has the overall responsibility for ensuring that the special educational needs of students are met. Therefore, the principal should work with the Board of Management, teachers and parents in the development, implementation and review of the SEN policy to promote the inclusion of students with SEN.

### **Monitoring of policy and practice**

The Board of Management has the responsibility for overseeing the development, implementation, and review of school policies and services in relation to the inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs.

### **Review of Policy & Evaluation**

The policy will be evaluated against the objectives set out on page one by:

- Analysis of subject department and teacher planning and that a differentiated approach is taken and that learning objectives in IEP's are considered in planning.
- Students are involved and have their views noted in IEP.
- Parents are consulted and involved in target setting and learning objectives.
- Student progress is monitored through specific, measurable, achievable, realistic time-bound targets (SMART).

- Outside agencies have their recommendations addressed as appropriate.
- External inspection.

Success criteria will be students who have special educational needs:

1. Reach their expected target as judged by objective testing, teacher professional judgement.
2. No longer need additional support.

## **Links to other school policy**

## **Complaints procedure**