St. Francis Xavier Senior National School



Special Education Policy

Ratified by the Board of Management in 2013

Last Reviewed: 12th August 2020

Next Review Date: June 2022

**Introduction**

This policy was formulated to encompass the New Model of special education needs provision as outlined by the Department of Education and Skills in Circular 13/2017.

Circular 13/2017 states that:

‘Pupils under the new allocation model will be identified by schools for additional teaching support in accordance with the NEPS Continuum of Support Guidelines, and the guidelines which accompany this Circular.’

This policy incorporates the guidelines referred to above and was formulated in consultation with teaching staff and management of St Francis Xavier school, the Board of Management, the National Psychological Service (NEPS) and the Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO).

**Definition**

In the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004) the term ‘special educational needs’ is defined 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……

(Government of Ireland, 2004b, section 1)

**Rationale**

This policy document aims to outline the school’s provision of additional educational support for students with SEN. It outlines the philosophy that underpins this provision and is written in the context of the various pieces of legislation outlined below. It is a working document and is a reflection of our current practice.

**Legal Framework**

St Francis Xavier Senior School sets out to provide education for all its students with reference to legislation regarding students with SEN as listed below:

* The Education Act (1998)
* The Education Welfare Act (2000)
* The Equal Status Act (2000)
* The Education for Persons with Disabilities (2003)
* The Equality Act (2004)
* The Data Protection Acts (1988, 1998, 2003, 2018)
* The Freedom of Education Acts (1997, 2003)
* The Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004)

This policy is drafted in the context of:

* DES Circular Letters
* Guidelines published by NCSE
* Guidelines on the Individual Education Plan Process 2006
* Guidelines on the Continuum of Support (NEPS)
* Guidelines published by the Special Educational Needs Support Service (SESS)

**Inclusion**

We are committed to the principles of inclusion and the good practice which makes it possible. The policy set out in this document aims to enable pupils with SEN to become fully integrated members of the school community. This is achieved by careful consideration of the needs of each pupil and by either modifying activities or providing support that will enable the pupil to participate fully. We celebrate the diversity of each individual and acknowledge the valuable contribution they make to our whole school community.

**Aims**

The principal aim of Learning Support at St Francis Xavier Senior School is to provide a positive learning environment to foster the academic, social and emotional development of pupils with learning needs and to enable each pupil to realise their individual potential. Central to this process is the effective provision of supplementary teaching of pupils with learning difficulties or special educational needs. The learning support service endeavours to fulfil the following aims:

* Enable pupils of all abilities to avail of an benefit from an appropriate education
* Provide supplementary teaching and additional support in literacy and numeracy
* Ensure pupils are offered a broad, balanced and differentiated curriculum
* Enhance the self-esteem of all pupils
* Promote collaboration among teachers in the implementation of a whole school policy on learning support for pupils
* Involve parents in supporting their children’s learning

At St Francis Xavier Senior School we endeavour to give maximum support and the most support to those in greatest need. We endeavour to achieve our aims through the implementation of whole school policies and approaches to target the learning needs of the lowest achieving pupils and those with special educational needs. Such policies and approaches have been developed with a view to co-ordinating the work of class teachers, special education teachers, learning support services, parents and others on behalf of our pupils. For example:

* Special Education Teachers (SET) adopt a team approach to the provision of supplementary teaching throughout the school and conduct regular meetings to discuss issues related to planning, implementation, evaluation and timetabling.
* Timetables are organised and co-ordinated in order to optimise the benefits of supplementary teaching with the minimum of disruption to individual class programmes of work
* Positive partnerships are encouraged and fostered with parents in order to achieve appropriate support at home
* Staff are supported by the Board of Management to engage in continuous professional development in relation to SEN

**Whole School Supporting Strategies**

Strategies for supporting learning difficulties include:

* Collaboration between teachers on agreed approaches to the teaching of Literacy and Numeracy
* Use of concrete materials at every opportunity
* Ongoing observation and assessment of language, literacy and numeracy skills
* Assessment procedures throughout the school - both Assessment of Learning (AoL) and Assessment for Learning (AfL) approaches
* Formal and informal parent teacher meetings by appointment to keep parents updated on pupils progress and/or challenges
* Provision of additional support in language development, literacy and numeracy skills to pupils when needed

**Continuum of Support**

The model of assessment and provision as practised at St Francis Xavier Senior School is underpinned by the recognition that special educational needs occur along a continuum, from mild to severe and from transient to long term. Our response to the needs of students is organised according to NEPS Continuum of Support. We envisage that movement from one level of support to the next will be governed by the pupil’s progress in attaining specified learning targets.

**Stage 1 – Classroom Support**

A class teacher or parent may have concerns about the academic, physical, social, organisational, behavioural or emotional development of a pupil and may notice the emergence of learning difficulties. The teacher administers screening measures including screening and performance checklists where appropriate. The class teacher draws up a Student Support Plan for extra assistance in the relevant areas of learning and/or behavioural management. The programme is reviewed regularly with appropriate parental involvement. If concerns remain the support teachers are consulted about the need for intervention at stage 2.

**Stage 2 – School Support**

If intervention at stage 2 is considered necessary the pupil is referred to the support teacher for further testing with parents’ permission. If diagnostic assessment suggests that supplementary teaching may be beneficial, the support teacher in collaboration with the class teacher and parents devises a learning programme to include appropriate interventions for implementation in the home, in the classroom and during supplementary teaching. A School Support plan and/or a Group Profile is developed where agreed learning needs are prioritised and progress reviewed at regular intervals. If significant concerns remain after a number of reviews and adaptations to the learning programme, it may be necessary to provide intervention at stage 3.

**Stage 3 – School Support Plus**

Some pupils who continue to present with significant learning needs will require more intensive intervention at stage 3. Where pupils have failed to make progress after the implementation of a learning programme at stage 2, the school may request a consultation, and where appropriate, an assessment of need from a specialist outside the school for the following categories of pupils:

* those with significant learning difficulties
* those with significant behavioural problems
* those with serious emotional disturbance and /or behavioural problems
* those demonstrating characteristics associated with low incidence disabilities

The support teacher will co-ordinate the referral process in consultation with parents and the class teacher using referral forms such as NEPS ‘Request for Involvement of Psychologist’.

A School Support Plus plan is developed for pupils at stage 3 on the continuum. The School Support Plus plan is a working document devised in consultation with the support teacher, the class teacher, parents and when appropriate a special needs assistant (SNA). Targets are agreed and progress is reviewed at regular intervals. The School Support Plus process involves:

* gathering information – personal/background information
* educational details - assessment and learning support details
* categorisation of need – assessment reports/information attained from parents
* general profile based on formal and informal assessment
* priority needs – setting targets for each priority learning need
* identifying strategies and resources required
* setting dates for reviews
* SEN provision

**Models of Support**

There are three key models of support at St Francis Xavier Senior School and their use is dependent on the needs of the pupils and the strategies chosen to enable pupils to achieve learning targets. The model of support will be determined by the focus of instruction and the needs of the pupils in the class. Key elements and considerations are outlined below:

**Withdrawal Model**

Pupils whose needs have not been successfully addressed at Stage one of the continuum may be withdrawn from the classroom to work in small groups to support learning needs. When appropriate individualised teaching is provided to address specific learning needs.

**In-Class Support Model/Co-operative Learning**

The support teacher and the class teacher work in the classroom at the same time. Both teachers plan activities for groups based on the skill level of the group. Small groups of mixed ability and/or groups with specific learning needs are formed. The focus of the support teacher is to work with pupils with identified learning needs.

**Parallel Teaching**

The class is divided into two groups of the same or mixed ability. The class teacher works with one group and the support teacher works with the second group. The content of the lesson is the same.

**Roles of Responsibility**

The role of supporting learning is a collaborative responsibility shared by the school community:

**Board of Management**

The overall responsibility for the provision of education to all students, including students with special educational needs, lies with the Board of Management. In this regard the board should;

* ensure that all students with learning support and/or special educational needs are identified, assessed and provided with appropriate support and intervention within the limits of the school’s resources
* ensure that the school has a special educational needs policy in place, monitor the implementation of that policy and ensure its evaluation
* ensure that a broad, balanced and differentiated curriculum is provided to assist students with special educational needs achieve their potential
* ensure that the necessary resources are sought on behalf of students with special educational needs and assist with provision of funds for the purchase of materials
* provide secure facilities for the storage of records and documents

**Principal**

The principal has responsibility for all aspects of the day-to-day management of the policy and provision for students with special educational needs. In this regard the Principal should;

* appoint a SEN co-ordinator and work closely with the co-ordinator
* establish a Special Needs Support Team within the school with the specific remit to ensure identification of and support for students with special educational needs
* promote a whole school approach to special educational needs, make all staff aware of their responsibilities in this area and facilitate appropriate staff development in this area
* promote the development of positive partnerships with parents of SEN students
* manage the implementation of policies and practices
* monitor the selection of pupils for supplementary teaching ensuring a focus on pupils with very low achievement
* outline the support that is available to parents of pupils who experience learning difficulties or have other special educational needs
* arrange for the provision of SEN funding and resources
* together with the SEN Co-ordinator, organise Special Class ‘Sonas’ and oversee the provision available
* consult with the SEN Co-ordinator and other personnel who liaise with the Department of Education regarding needs and provisions

**SEN Co-ordinator**

The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator is a core member of the SEN team and works with other members of the team in facilitating the provision of education for students with special educational needs and their inclusion in the school. In this regard the SEN Co-ordinator should;

* co-ordinate and devise a school SEN plan
* create and maintain a register of students with SEN
* assist in the identification of students with SEN
* assist in making class teachers aware of relevant information about students with special educational needs and advise on how these students can be supported
* ensure that Support Plans at stages 1, 2 and 3 and structured learning plans are in place for students
* collaborate with support teachers in the compilation of relevant information concerning pupils where intervention at stage 3 of the staged approach is sought
* co-ordinate the caseloads and work schedules of support teachers
* co-ordinate and organise SNAs work and timetabling
* liaise with outside professionals including NEPS psychologist and SENO
* advise and collaborate with SNAs around the care needs of relevant students
* ensure resources are available for students and the SEN team
* facilitate regular meetings of the SEN team

**Special Education Teacher**

The duties and activities of the SET teacher include;

* in consultation with the class teacher, identifying students who may have general or specific learning difficulties or other special educational needs
* conducting diagnostic testing and informal assessments of students in order to monitor progress and evaluate effectiveness of interventions
* providing supplementary teaching to students who experience low achievement and/or learning difficulties
* collaborating with class teachers by giving advice on teaching methodologies best suited to students
* developing Support Plans for students in consultation with the relevant partners
* meeting with class teachers to plan and discuss student’s progress
* maintaining monthly plans and progress records
* contributing at meetings involving parents and/or outside agencies when appropriate
* implementing suitable recommendations from outside agencies, wherever possible, and liaise with outside agencies pertinent to the pupils on SET teachers caseload
* advising SNAs around the care needs of relevant students
* contributing to the development of the SEN policy at the whole school level
* attending regular meetings with SEN team

**Class Teacher**

The class teacher has primary responsibility for the progress of all students in his/her class including students selected for supplementary teaching and/or those with special educational needs. In this regard the class teacher should;

* in consultation with the SET teacher, identify students who may have general or specific learning difficulties or other special educational needs
* differentiate the curriculum appropriately to meet the needs of all students
* create a positive classroom environment for all students
* modify presentation and questioning techniques to maximise involvement of students with learning needs
* assess and monitor progress of all students
* consider the needs of students with special educational needs in all aspects of classroom planning
* contribute to curriculum planning for students with special educational needs
* seek advice from the SEN team regarding students with special educational needs
* advise parents of the support that is available to students who experience learning difficulties or have special educational needs
* assist in the selection of students for supplementary teaching
* discuss the results of screening measures with the SET teacher and the type of intervention that would best meet the student’s needs
* collaborate with the SET teacher in reviewing the progress of students at the end of each instructional term
* collaborate with the SET teacher in developing student’s Support Plans
* direct the work of SNAs in the classroom
* keep parents informed about the student’s progress and advise them as to how they might help the student at home

**Special Needs Assistant (SNA)**

An SNA’s role is to carry out duties based on the primary care needs of the pupil. In carrying out these duties the SNA should:

* provide care assistance to students with special educational needs including administration of medicine and assisting with toileting and general hygiene
* assist with mobility and orientation including assisting a student to access the school and classroom
* assist students with physical disabilities, sensory needs and students with significant social and emotional difficulties
* recognise their role in the health and safety of the students in their social, emotional and educational development
* assist and escort students on school outings
* accompany small groups who may be withdrawn for learning support
* engage with parents of students with special educational needs as required and as directed by school management
* assist the teacher in the supervision of students during assembly, recreation, in movement around the school and at dispersal times
* assist the class teacher with duties of a non-teaching nature
* motivate and encourage the students in their care
* assist students with use of equipment such as concrete learning materials and computers
* assist with other duties as may be determined by the needs of the students under the direction of the principal

**Pupil**

Pupils in receipt of supplementary teaching should, as appropriate:

* outline his/her interests, aspirations, strengths. Complete the “My Thoughts About School” form
* contribute to the evaluation of their progress by participating in appropriate assessment activities, including self-assessment, conferencing and questioning
* contribute to the selection of texts and other learning materials that are relevant to the attainment of learning targets
* develop ownership of the skills and strategies that are taught during supplementary teaching and learn to apply these learning strategies and skills to improve their own learning

**Parents**

Parents can support the work of the school in supporting their child by:

* providing a home environment in which there are opportunities for adults and children to participate together in language, literacy and mathematical activities
* engaging in discussions about school and other activities to build vocabulary and thinking skills
* participating in paired and shared reading activities
* modelling involvement in language, literacy and mathematical activities by engaging in and talking about these activities in the home
* availing of real life situations to discuss the importance of language, literacy and mathematics
* using information and communications technology (ICT) where available, to support learning
* attending meetings with class teachers and support teachers to discuss progress

**External Bodies and Agencies**

Pupils with significant and enduring needs may be supported and guided by external professionals. A multi-disciplinary approach to the identification, diagnosis and assessment of needs and development of interventions will be of benefit to both pupils and teachers.

Management, class teachers and SET teachers communicate and liaise with personnel from the agencies listed below when appropriate:

* N.E.P.S. (National Education Psychological Service)
* S.E.N.O. (Special Education Needs Organiser)
* H.S.E. (Health Service Executive)
* C.A.M.H.S. (Child and Adult Mental Health Services)
* Children’s Disability Network Team
* N.C.S.E. Support Service
* Educational Psychologist and/or OT reports organised by parents privately
* Medical Professional Reports

**Selection Criteria**

Selection of pupils for additional learning support is guided by the Continuum of Support documents and the guidelines outlined in Circular 13/2017. This circular sets out the manner in which schools should identify pupils for additional teaching support. In accordance with these guidelines appropriate support is provided for:

* pupils diagnosed as having ‘Low Incidence Learning Disabilities’
* pupils diagnosed as having ‘High Incidence Learning Disabilities’
* pupils scoring at or below the 10th percentile on standardised assessment tests in literacy
* pupils scoring at or below the 12th percentile on standardised assessment tests in literacy, to allow for a margin of error
* pupils scoring at or below the 10th percentile on standardised assessment tests in mathematics
* pupils scoring at or below the 12th percentile on standardised assessment tests in mathematics, to allow for a margin of error
* pupils scoring at or below the 30th percentile on standardised assessments in literacy, who continue to experience difficulty despite interventions made by the class teacher at Stage 1 support
* pupils who were previously in receipt of supplementary teaching from a resource or learning support teacher and who continue to experience significant learning difficulties
* pupils with mild or transient educational needs including those associated with speech and language difficulties, social or emotional problems, or co-ordination or attention control difficulties

**Assessment/Progress/Review**

Class teachers carry out initial screening tests and standardised assessments. The Special Education Teacher will administer further screening tests and diagnostic tests if it is deemed necessary. If diagnostic tests are to be administered parents will be informed and permission sought.

Standardised assessment and screening tests in use are:

* Drumcondra Reading Test
* Drumcondra Spelling Test
* Drumcondra Maths Test
* NVRT

Diagnostic tests in use are:

* Dyslexia Screening Test (GL Assessment)
* Single Word Spelling Test

In addition to the above tests formal and informal testing and observation of work by the class teacher and special education teacher are conducted on an on-going basis. Class teachers and SET teachers meet regularly to discuss and review pupils progress and attainment of targets set.

The period of intervention for each pupil is dependent on the nature and extent of their individual need. The duration of provision is varied and is reviewed throughout the intervention. Parents will be informed of any decision made.

**Transition to Post Primary**

Both the class teacher and SET teacher liaise with the SEN team of relevant post primary schools when pupils in receipt of supplementary teaching are transferring to second level schools. Effective transition support and planning reduce potential anxiety for both pupils and parents. The reporting and transfer of pupil information from primary to post-primary school is facilitated by the use of the Education Passport tool developed by the NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment).

**English as an Additional Language (EAL)**

Support for students with EAL needs is outlined in a separate policy document. These students may also have literacy and mathematic support needs which are catered for in the models of support outlined in this document.

**Monitoring and Reviewing this Policy**

The Principal and SEN Co-ordinator have responsibility for monitoring and reviewing this policy. Staff and the Board of Management will engage in the developmental process and the policy will be reviewed as necessary.

***ADDENDUM* – Adjustments for impacts of Covid-19**

* Due to the restrictions in place as outlined in DE Covid-19 Response Plan, in-class and parallel teaching will not take place during the pandemic phase.
* SEN pupils will continue to be provided with additional teaching support by withdrawal.
* Pupils will be withdrawn within their class bubble only. No mixing of class bubbles will take place.
* A 5 minute gap between each support session to allow for room ventilation and sanitising of desks/chairs etc.
* SNAs will work across a maximum of two classes.
* SET team timetables will be adjusted accordingly.

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management in 2013. Last reviewed August 2020. Next review date June 2022.

John Mitchell

Chairperson

On behalf of the Board of Management.