



# St. Raphaela's Primary School

## Whole School Policy for Special Needs

### **Whole School Staff Statement:**

Our school aims to ensure that each pupil is given the maximum opportunity and support to develop his or her full potential and to foster his or her positive self-esteem.

"We seek to promote confidence, personal responsibility and self discipline in each child, always respecting the unique giftedness of each one". (School Mission Statement).

### **Rationale for Special Needs Policy:**

This policy has been devised in order to update and review the existing policy, in accordance with recent Department Circulars regarding Special Needs Education. It will also act as the source of information for the parents and staff of our school as to how children with special needs are supported in St. Raphaela's Primary School.

### **Aims of Learning Support.**

The principal aim of Learning Support is to optimise the teaching and learning process in order to enable pupils with learning difficulties to attain satisfactory levels of proficiency in literacy and numeracy before leaving Primary School. Our school intends to achieve this aim through a whole-school and co-coordinated approach to meet the learning needs of the lowest achieving pupils.

### **Further Aims:**

- To provide supplementary teaching and additional support and resources for these pupils in English and Mathematics.
- To provide an improved self-image for the child through praise, encouragement, and recognition of personal progress and success.
- To develop and implement an I.E.P. for each child.
- To enable these pupils to monitor their own learning and to facilitate independent learning strategies.
- To provide early intervention programmes in infant classes aimed at preventing later reading difficulties.
- To expose the children to stimulating reading material in a climate where reading and associated activities are enjoyable and valued.
- To promote collaboration among teachers in the implementation of whole school policies on learning support for pupils.
- To ensure the staff are kept informed of new approaches to reading.
- To confer with parents and outside agencies to plan the best support for each child.

### **Enrolment Policy of children with special needs:**

St. Raphaela's Primary School is non-selective academically, and welcomes children of varying abilities. It seeks to provide for the needs of each individual child (c.f. Mission Statement.) Children with S.E.N. may learn at a different pace and in a different way from other children. They need to belong to a peer group and to mix with children of different abilities in a variety of situations. Children will be catered for in the mainstream classroom but may be withdrawn in small groups for additional support.

### **Staff roles and responsibilities.**

#### **The role of the Principal Teacher:**

The Principal has overall responsibility for the development, implementation and co-ordination of the school policies on Learning Support and Special Needs. The Principal:

- Monitors the implementation of the school plan and the selection of pupils for supplementary teaching, ensuring that it is focused on those with low achievement.
- Supports the implementation of a tracking system at whole school level to monitor the progress of children with learning difficulties.

#### **The Principal and Learning Support Teacher:**

- Advise parents on procedures for availing of special needs or support services.
- Liaise with psychological services to arrange assessments and special provision for pupils with special needs.
- Maintain a list of pupils who require supplementary teaching and special educational support.
- Co-ordinate the caseloads and work schedules of learning support, resource teacher and language support.
- Consult with class teachers on the identification and screening of pupils who have learning needs and how to best provide for those needs.

#### **The Principal and Resource Teacher:**

- Identify children who have been allocated extra resource hours for particular special needs and plan the workload of the resource teacher.
- Consult with class teachers and parents about the work programme best suited for the pupil's needs.

#### **The Principal and the Language Support Teacher:**

- Identify the children within the school for whom English is not a first language and need extra language support.
- Collaborate with class teachers on suitable programmes and timetabling to provide language support.
- Advise parents of this service available within the school.

### **The Special Needs Team:**

The Principal, Learning Support teacher, Resource teacher and Language Support teacher will work as a Special Needs team, collaborating, consulting and planning workloads and timetables to best implement this school policy to support children with special needs within our school. The teachers will meet on a monthly basis to discuss programmes of work, resources, I.E. and any recent information obtained from outside agencies which relates to pupils with special needs

### **The role of the Special Needs Team:**

- To collaborate with the Principal, teachers and parents in the development of whole-school policies for learning support.
- To meet the Principal at least once a term to discuss issues related to the implementation of the special needs policy.
- To consult with the Principal in areas of pupil referral to special education services.
- To acquire suitable teaching and learning resources for pupils with S.E.N.
- To agree individual education profiles (I.E.) with each class teacher.
- To work with and consult S.N.A.'s working with pupils with S.E.N.

### **The role of the Learning Support Teacher:**

- To consult with the Principal on identifying pupils with S.E.N. and devising plans to best suit their needs.
- To develop an I.E.P. for each child selected for supplementary teaching in consultation with the parents and class teachers.
- To maintain weekly planning and progress records for each group receiving learning support.
- To provide intensive early intervention programmes for junior pupils.
- To provide support teaching for senior pupils experiencing low achievement or learning difficulties in English and/or Maths.
- To co-ordinate whole school procedures for the selection of pupils for learning support.
- To contribute to the development and implementation of the Special Needs Policy.
- To provide advice and support to class teachers in approaches and resources for pupils with learning difficulties.
- To discuss purchase of appropriate learning resources and materials for pupils with special needs to use in their mainstream class and in the learning support room.

### **Role of Resource Teacher:**

A Resource Teacher assists us in providing support for children with Special Educational needs arising from disability by:

- Assessing and recording child needs and progress
- Setting specific, time related targets for each child and agreeing these with the class teacher and the principal
- Direct teaching of children either in a separate room or within the mainstream class
- Team teaching -so long as the children concerned are deriving benefit from it.
- Advising class teachers in regard to adapting the curriculum, teaching strategies, suitable textbooks, use of ICT and a range of other related matters.

- Meeting and advising parents when necessary accompanied by the class teacher as necessary
- Short meetings with other relevant professionals in the childrens' interest e.g psychologists, speech and language therapists, and occupational therapists.

### **Role of Language Support Teacher:**

The Language Support teacher is responsible for helping children for whom English is not a first language acquire English language so that they can participate as fully as they possibly can in the class activities. She/he will place strong emphasis on oral language. Each child will normally attend language support classes for a period not exceeding two years.

### **Role of the Class Teacher:**

"The class teacher has primary responsibility for the progress of all pupils in the class, including those selected for supplementary teaching". (Learning Support Guidelines page 42).

- To differentiate the class curriculum appropriately so as to optimize the learning of all pupils within the class and to help the pupils with special needs to achieve success at their own levels in class.
- To follow the agreed approaches to language development, reading and writing as outlined in the English school plan.
- To provide learning activities which are suitably challenging but which also ensure success and progress in order to build self-esteem.
- To contribute to the development of learning targets in the pupil's I.E.D.
- To implement appropriate activities to help attain these targets.
- To administer and score appropriate screening tests and to discuss outcomes with the special needs team.
- To discuss with the Learning Support teacher the results of diagnostic assessment and to decide the type of intervention needed to best meet needs of pupil.
- To review with L.S.T. pupils progress at the end of each instructional term.
- To make initial contact with parents to discuss concerns about their child's progress and to seek the approval of the parents to proceed with further assessment.
- To be aware of, to be kept updated and to consult with relevant professionals about the special needs of children with mild or specific learning difficulties within the class.

### **The Role of Parents:**

Parental contribution to their child's learning programme has a hugely positive influence on the overall progress and self esteem of the child with learning difficulties. The active involvement of parents in the school enhances the effectiveness of the whole school.

Parents can support the work of the school and learning support by:

- Providing learning activities at home in language, literacy and Maths in the early years and throughout the child's' school years.
- Encouraging the use of ICT at home to support learning English and/or Maths.
- Reading stories to their child.

- Paired reading sessions.
- Discussing school and activities in school to encourage a positive attitude.
- Writing lists about school events and to build developing vocabulary.
- Counting and measuring activities at home in practical situations e.g. cooking, shopping.
- Implementing suggested home based activities outlined in child's IEP.
- Keeping school informed of progress observed in their child's learning.
- Attending meetings with L.S.T. and class teacher re - I.E.P.'s, progress and assessments.

### **The Role of Pupils:**

The involvement of pupils in developing, implementing and reviewing their own learning programme is important for them to become independent learners. Pupils attending learning support will learn to take responsibility for their own learning as appropriate:

- By becoming familiar with short-term targets that have been set for them and to set their own targets.
- By selecting their own reading material that is relevant to attaining those targets.
- By applying learning strategies taught during support teaching to the classroom environment.
- By evaluating their own programme and by self-assessing their work.

### **The Learning Support Teacher and Parents:**

Effective communication with parents is critically important to the success of a learning support programme. The L.S.T. will provide general information to parents about learning support services available in the school.

- Meet with parents of each pupil selected for diagnostic assessment and discuss outcomes.
- Decide targets for each pupil I E.P with parents, including the actions to be taken to meet those targets at home and in school.
- Communicate on an ongoing basis with parents with positive affirmation of progress and early identification of difficulties.
- Consult with parents at the end of each instructional term to review attainment of targets, to revise I.E.P's and to discuss level of supplementary teaching needed.
- Advise and consult with parents when supplementary teaching is discontinued and identify ways pupil can be continually supported at home.
- Demonstrate teaching strategies to parents that will help with the child's learning.

### **Coordinating selection of pupils:**

- LS teacher co-ordinates the administration of whole school screening programme to identify pupils with very low achievement and learning difficulties in English and Maths.
- Consults with class teachers on the identification of pupils who may need diagnostic assessment.
- Co-ordinates with class teachers the implementation of the staged approach to special education needs (DES circular SP.Ed. 24/03)

## **Staged Approach to Learning Support:**

Our approach to learning support is a staged one.

**Stage 1:** A class teacher or a parent may have concerns about the academic, physical, social, behavioral or emotional development of certain pupils. The teacher will then administer screening measures, which may include screening checklists, or standardized tests for older children. The class teacher will then draw up a short, simple plan for extra help within the normal classroom setting within the relevant areas of learning and/or behaviour management. The success of the plan will be reviewed on a regular basis with appropriate parental involvement. If concern remains after approximately two terms, the Special Education Support Team will be consulted about the desirability of a move to Stage 11.

**Stage 2:** In the case of children with learning difficulties if the class teachers plan fails to achieve the desired outcome then the child should be referred to the Learning Support Teacher with parental permission for further diagnostic testing. If results indicate that supplementary teaching would be beneficial then this should be arranged. Parents and Class teacher will be involved with Learning Support teacher in drawing up the learning plan. Progress will be reviewed regularly. If significant concerns remain after a period of at least one school term then it may be necessary to implement stage 111.

In the case of children with emotional or behavioural difficulties it is recognized that, with serious difficulties, more urgent action may be needed. In these cases the child's needs should, with parental permission, be discussed with the relevant NEPS psychologist or referred to the clinical services of the Health Board. This may lead to a more detailed plan of behavioural management at home, in class, and or referral for further specialist assessment (Stage 111)

**Stage 3:** At this stage the school formally requests a consultation and where appropriate, an assessment of need from a specialist outside the school in respect of children with learning difficulties or mild/moderate behavioural problems who have failed to make progress after being given supplementary teaching or behavioural management programmes. Such specialist advice may be sought from psychologists, paediatricians, speech and language therapists, etc. The parents will be consulted throughout the process.

## **Provision of Learning Support by the L.S. Teacher:**

The LS teacher devises and implements an early intervention programme for intensive small group or one to one tutoring in English and Maths for selected pupils. This may be done in the LS room or partly in classroom - as appropriate.

- Conducts an initial diagnostic assessment of each pupil who has been identified as having learning difficulties and records findings in pupils file or profile.
- Prepares a weekly/fortnightly planning and progress record for each group or individual.
- Monitors and records progress re learning targets, short-term objectives and records observations in weekly record.
- Reviews progress at the end of instructional term.

## **Selection of Pupils for Learning Support**

Pupils with low achievement in English and/or Maths are the main priority for learning support provision. These pupils are selected through the following process in our school.

### **Preliminary Screening**

Preliminary screening of pupils by their class teacher is conducted through the administration of one or more screening tests, curriculum profiles, checklists and observations.

- In Infant Classes:  
Screening checklists and profiles.  
Teacher observations and records.  
Middle Infants Standard Tests (MIST Tests)
- From First to Sixth classes:  
Curriculum checklists.  
Micra T Assessment.  
Sigma T Assessment.

### **Selection for Diagnostic Assessment**

Following consultation with the class teacher a cut off point is applied to screening test results. Priority is given to pupils who achieve scores at or below the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile or a below average result on the MIST test. Consideration will be given to those achieving scores up to or below the 12<sup>th</sup> percentile in order to allow for measurement error. Consultation with the class teacher and the support team will select pupils for further diagnostic assessment. The class teacher will inform the parents of results and seek consent for this diagnostic assessment.

### **Diagnostic Assessment**

After consultation with the class teacher, and with parental consent, the Learning Support teacher will administer initial diagnostic assessment. The objectives of this diagnostic assessment are:

- To identify the aspects of English and/or Math's in which the pupil has particular strengths or difficulties.
- To identify, gather and collate information essential for the I.E.P.
- To identify the needs of the pupil and the appropriate level and type of learning support required.

The type of diagnostic assessment administered will depend on the pupil's stage of development. The following elements will be included in the assessment of pupils at the early reading stage:

- Print awareness and conventions.
- Phonemic awareness.
- Rhyming ability.
- Letter identification.

- Knowledge of letter sounds.
- Recognition of basic sight words.
- Visual discrimination.
- Understanding the meaning of words and sentences.
- Spelling ability.
- Writing skills.

Tests that are administered include:

- N.R.I.T. (Non Reading Intelligence Tests)
- 100 word dolch checklist.
- Visual Discrimination Test.
- Wepman Auditory Discrimination Test.
- Phonemic Awareness Test.

For pupils at the emergent reader stage, diagnostic assessment will involve focus on the following elements:

- Reading accuracy.
- Sentence and passage comprehension.
- Word recognition.
- Vocabulary meaning.
- Word analysis skills.
- Miscue analysis.
- Reading fluency.
- Study skills.
- Spelling ability.
- Handwriting skills.
- Free written expression.

The following tests include these elements for assessment.

- Young Reading Test.
- Graded Word Test.
- RAIN Reading Test.
- 100 Word Dolch Checklist.
- GAP Comprehension Test.
- Neale Analysis.
- Wepman Auditory Discrimination.
- Visual Discrimination Test.
- Schonell Spelling Test.
- Diagnostic Profiles.
- Samples of free writing.
- Samples of handwriting.

Other elements of learning that will be addressed during assessment will give a wider picture of the pupils needs:

- Oral language proficiency.
- Receptive language.
- General attitude to learning.

Tests accompanying general observation and conversation with the child include:

- Goodenough Draw a Man.
- Aston Index.
- N.R.I.T.

In relation to diagnostic assessment of mathematics the following areas will be focused on:

- Conservation of number.
- Understanding of Math's concepts and the language of Math's.
- Number sense.
- Computation Skills.
- Application of skills.
- Problem solving strategies.
- Recall of number facts.
- Mathematical reasoning.

The Sigma T test and Norman France's Profile of Mathematics will be the main tests used for mathematical assessment.

### **Summarising the Results of Diagnostic Assessment**

The results of diagnostic assessment are recorded in the I.E.P. for each pupil. This profile will also include:

- Previous test results.
- Relevant information from parents, class teachers and other professionals.
- Identification of the pupil's particular needs.

### **Procedures for further Assessment**

After diagnostic assessment and a completed instructional term of learning support, each child's I.E.P. and needs will be reviewed. If there are serious concerns expressed by the class teacher, support teacher and parents, further psychological assessment will be explored. The Learning Support teacher will seek the advice of the NEPS psychologist and discuss the test results and concerns about the pupil. Based on the advice received, the application for a full assessment, if required, will be completed by the Learning Support Teacher. This will involve detailed information gathering from all sources involved, to compile a comprehensive report for the psychologist.

In the event of a parent refusing consent for diagnostic assessment or referral for further assessment, a letter stating this refusal and recognizing the school's efforts to arrange assessment will be required from the parent.

### **Programme Planning and Intervention**

Following diagnostic assessment and prior to the commencement of supplementary teaching the Special Needs Team will decide on who will provide the necessary support required - whether it is to be the responsibility of the Learning Support teacher, the Resource teacher or the Language Support teacher. The appointed teacher will then consult with the parents and the class teacher to discuss other elements of learning that will be addressed during assessment will give a wider picture of the pupils needs:

- Oral language proficiency.
- Receptive language.
- General attitude to learning.

Individual programme planning for each pupil is developed in the I.E.P. (Individual Education Programme). After the collection of all relevant information, pupils learning strengths and needs are specified and formulated to choose short term learning targets and activities. An inclusive approach involves class teachers, parents and pupils in devising these targets.

I.E.P's include:

- Details of the pupil's age and class.
- Current teachers.
- Assessment details.
- Strengths.
- Areas of difficulties.
- Relevant information.
- Organizational details.
- Timetabling of sessions.
- Individual or group sessions.
- Learning targets and activities to meet those targets.

A sample I.E.P. is included with this policy. An I.E.P. is prepared for each pupil receiving support from the Special Needs Department. S.N.A.s working with pupils are also involved in developing and implementing the targets within the I.E.P. A copy of each I.E.P. is given to the school principal, the class teacher and SNA and filed in L.S.T. records.

### **Weekly Planning and Progress Records**

Each week's work is planned in advance and in accordance with the targets in each I.E.P. These plans are submitted to the Principal each month. Every attempt is made to support the class work in parallel planning. Regular contact with class teachers is essential for this to succeed.

Daily activities for each group are recorded in weekly records. Observations of pupils work, attitude, effort, homework, difficulties and successes achieved are also noted. These are an invaluable source of information for the review at the end of the instructional term.

### **Review of Programmes**

The review of each pupil's progress at the end of each instructional term will assess the learning targets achieved from their I.E.P. Evaluating the progress made will determine the level of continued learning support required. This decision will also be informed by the class teachers observations on the pupils progress in class and by parents observations about progress and behaviour. Outcomes of targets in the I.E.P. are the main focus. If supplementary teaching is to be continued, previous targets may be extended or new targets established. The type of continued support would also consider whether within or out of the pupils classroom is most suitable.

### **Professional Development**

The staff are supported in availing of professional development in the area of special needs through contact with the Learning Support Cuiditheoir service; the P.C.P.S. English; notice of courses in Blackrock Education Centre; provision of copies of circulars, extra information articles or literature made available in the staff room.

### **Special Needs Assistants**

The S.N.A is recruited to assist a child or children with disabilities in an educational context. The duties of the SNA are of a non - teaching nature and will include any special assistance which the child may require. ( c.f. SNA job description).

### **Transfer to Post Primary**

A transfer report, including I.E.P.'s will be provided to the Post Primary School to assist smooth transition for the pupil. Where possible, a meeting will be arranged with the future support team to discuss the pupil's needs at the end of the school year.

### **History of this policy and review date:**

This policy was first created in May 2003. It was reviewed and updated in the light of changes in Special Education and in our provision in January 2005. The policy was ratified by the Board of Management in February 2005. It will be reviewed again in Summer 2008.

## Sample Refusal Letter

We (.....Parents names) do not wish our child .....  
to receive Learning Support in St. Raphaela's Primary School at this time. We/I understand  
that his/her class teacher has recommended further diagnostic assessment but we/I do not  
wish this to be administered at this time.

Signed: ..... (Mother)

..... (Father)

..... (School Principal)

Date: .....