

# Special Education Policy



**March 2021:** The following policy is the updated Special Education Policy in Scoil Ghobnatan. This policy statement arises from a review of a previous special needs policy (2017/18) which involved a pilot programme and restructuring of Scoil Ghobnatan’s delivery of Special Education across four stages of our learning community catering from junior infants to sixth class and our special classes.

Principal Donal O’Shea, Deputy Principal Eleanor Walsh and Stage Leaders Kay Lehane, Cathriona Ring, Aoife Flynn and Orla Mason were involved in the initial drafting. A draft policy was presented to the whole school staff and submissions sought. The Principal and Deputy Principal discussed the draft policy with the Parents Support Group and sought their views on the policy. Following these consultations this final draft was prepared by the Principal and presented to the BOM for ratification. This policy was reviewed in 2018 to take account of changes made by DES and NCSE and in light of changing practices in school and other developments.

## Special Education Policy 2021 – Review & Update March 2021

In 2021, Scoil Ghobnatan experienced a transition in its’ Leadership Management Team with the new appointment of Principal Donal O’Shea in January 2021. Deputy Principal Eleanor Walsh and four new Assistant Principals were also appointed in November 2020. We reviewed the new and existing model of Special Education in Scoil Ghobnatan. To help and support us in our endeavours we engaged with our newly appointed NEPS Psychologist, Evelyn Buckley and our SENO Ruth Elwood. S.E.Ts engaged in professional development online during the Covid 19 pandemic undertaking a course in ‘Leading The Provision of SEN in Mainstream Primary Schools’ with Cork and Sligo Education Support Centres. The **four learning communities** met to review and update the policy on our return to school after lockdown.

**Stage 1** – Junior & Senior Infants.

**Stage 2** – 1st & 2nd Classes

**Stage 3** – 3rd & 4th Classes

**Stage 4** – 5th & 6th Classes

The pupils within each learning community are currently supported by a team of Special Education Teachers working in close co-operation with Class Teachers and SNA staff to facilitate the best possible learning outcomes for all. We provide a range of supports including team teaching in class interventions e.g.; L.L.O., Maths (Early Maths Activities) group teaching both within and outside of the classroom and one-to-one teaching as appropriate. All children experience the benefits of various learning environments. These interventions were reviewed and assessed. Monthly stage meetings involving all staff working within the stage are facilitated to allow for efficient communication planning and on-going review. A weekly provision for planning is incorporated into the timetable of all support teachers. This time will allow for collaboration with class teachers, other support teachers, SNA staff, parents or outside agencies as required.

The Continuum of Support Model is being implemented for all pupils whose needs are in the process of being identified and supported. For pupils who have existing I.E.P.'s, the new School Plan Plus is used to plan for their support and the review is being conducted following the review template.

The new Model of Special Education is a positive development for Scoil Ghobnatan which has brought an additional allocation of support teachers to our school. We are engaging in the process of change and development with our new Leadership Management Team as well as a transition in the 'Progressing Services for Children and Young People' Programme. This national initiative led by the H.S.E involves many of our S.E.N pupils and is being established in our local community at present. Important to note is that our S.E.N pupils have been absent from school during the periods March 2020-June 2020 and January 2021-February 2021. They have been supported by our Class Teachers, Special Education Teachers and Special Needs Assistants by engaging in our remote teaching and learning approach via Microsoft Teams, Whats App, phone-calls and learning packages posted home on a fortnightly basis. While some pupils have actively engaged, others have fallen significantly behind and a compilation of this data will contribute to adjustments in our existing policy.

Changes will be made to the Special Educational Needs Policy as appropriate to the year 2021.

### **Rationale and Scope**

A Review of our Special Educational Needs Policy is required at this time:

- To cater for the enrolment and education of pupils with special education needs in the mainstream setting.
- To give effect to the aspirations set out in the school mission statement and the school aims.
- To comply with recent legislation and department circulars in this area.
- To streamline the provision of special needs support in the school.
- The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 defines a special educational need as,

*“ a restriction in capacity to participate in and benefit from education due to an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition”*

Furthermore, the rationale for this policy is to ensure the school's compliance with relevant legislation including The Education Act (1998). The Education Welfare Act (2002). The Equal Status Act (2000), Disability Bill (2002) and the E.P.S.O.N. Act (2004)

Learning Support Guidelines 2000, p. 1 refers to pupils whose achievement is at a very low level and who are at risk of not reaching adequate levels of proficiency in literacy and numeracy before leaving primary school.

Scoil Ghobnatan, as a school community has a commitment to the principles of inclusion. This commitment has been demonstrated with the provision of support educational facilities for all children with special educational needs. The establishment of a Language Class for children with a specific language difficulty addresses this particular need. An EBD unit was also set up in the school in Sept.2017. (Ref: EBD enrolment policy, DLD policy). In recent years the school has adapted to the changes in the provision of special education teaching for special needs pupils in mainstream classes there are now 13 Special Needs Assistants employed in the school. The school has also adopted an inclusive approach to the needs of “newcomer” children who are learning English as a second language.

This policy includes mainstream pupils in the following categories; Pupils in need of classroom support, school support, and support plan plus also EAL pupils.. We have adopted the Continuum of support model as recommended by our previous NEPS Psychologist Louise Brennan.

### **Relationship to Characteristic Spirit of the School**

We strive to provide the best provision possible for pupils with special educational needs. This is in keeping with the Christian ethos of this Catholic Primary School which aims to ensure that each child develops their talents and abilities to the full and which the values of love, justice, truth and charity are upheld. We are committed to an inclusive education for all pupils, we are conscious that each pupil enriches our school in his/her own individual way.

### **Aims**

- To enable pupils of all abilities to avail of and benefit from an appropriate education.
- To outline our whole school approach to teaching/learning in relation to pupils with special educational needs and to improve the quality of teaching and learning for all pupils with special educational needs.
- To set out procedures for the enrolment of children with special needs in Scoil Ghobnatan and to assist parents in making an informed decision in relation to their child.
- To outline procedures and practices to be followed in relation to supporting the learning of pupils with special educational needs.
- To establish communication structures for the involvement of all the partners in the education of pupils with special educational needs. (L.S. Guidelines)
- To enable the school community to make appropriate provision for all pupils of the school.

### **Enrolment**

The date of application for enrolment for all pupils, including pupils presenting with special needs will be March onwards of each school year. This enables the school to make provision for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and make provision/applications in accordance with their needs with the Special Education Needs Officer (SENO). Parents and/or Guardians(s)/Carers(s) will be contacted with regard to access to existing Psychologist’s reports and/or Speech and Language Therapy and/or Occupational Therapy or other professional reports. Enrolment is completed as follows, so as to gain as full and understanding about the pupil as possible;

- Initial meeting with Principal and Parent(s)/Guardian(s).
- Copies of school reports from previous schools attended and/or assessments are requested/welcomed.
- Written parental/guardian’s permission will be sought to access relevant reports.
- Meeting with parent(s)/guardians(s), prospective pupil, class teacher (in whose class the child may be placed) and/or Special Education Teacher e.g. teacher from the relevant Class or Learning Support Community/Special Class.

The staged approach as per Department of Education and Skills Guidelines will be used in offering support to a child with Special Educational Needs.

**Stage 1** – A classroom support plan in collaboration with parent(s)/guardian(s).

**Stage 2** – Referral to the support teacher for further diagnostic testing.

**Stage 3** – Referral for further specialist assessment, in consultation with parents/guardians/carers, e.g. National Education Psychological Service (NEPS), Speech and Language Therapy, Children and Adult Mental Health Service (CAMHS), Occupational Therapy (OT) (**see appendix 1 for further details re: staged approach support**).

In line with the Special Education Circular 02/05 App 3; “In the case of pupils identified at an early age as having very significant special education needs, intervention at stage 3 will be necessary on their entry to school” if the child has already been assessed by the relevant health care professional/is presenting with severe difficulties.

Also, “A child is entitled to attend the school which is most suited to his/her overall needs”, according to The Education of Persons with Disabilities Act 2004.

Parent(s)/Guardian(s) are required to notify the school of their child’s Special Needs in advance of enrolling in a mainstream class. The Board of Management in Scoil Ghobnatan will request a copy of the child’s medical and/or psychological report and/or any other relevant reports.

### **Procedures for Early Identification of Pupils with Special Educational Needs**

Request relevant records of all incoming pupils from feeder schools.

Administer appropriate standardised screening measures to all incoming pupils who were previously in receipt of supplementary teaching and/or to those whose test results indicated a need for further intervention. The continuum of support, as outlined in appendix 1 will be applied in identifying and providing for pupils with Special Educational Needs.

### **Preparation of a Group Learning Plan/School Support Plan**

1. In general it will be the support teacher who will prepare a child’s Support Plan/Group Plan in consultation with parents, class teacher and SNA.
2. The Plan may be individual or group depending on the nature and severity of the difficulties. Pupils requiring a Support Plan Plus who have been diagnosed with Special Educational Needs will generally have an individual plan.
3. Pupil progress will be reviewed by means of on-going observations, informal testing and formal standardised testing carried out by support teachers or classroom teachers.
4. If it is felt that a reduction or discontinuation of supplementary teaching is warranted based on reviews of progress the Principal will be notified and the parents will be contacted with a view to discussing the situation.
5. Where there are continuing concerns about a pupil’s progress following interventions at Stage 1 and 2 the Deputy Principal/Principal should be informed. The classroom teacher/support teacher will document progress to date and outline concerns that may warrant referral to an outside specialist.

### Drafting and Implementing a Support Plan Plus (for pupils at stage 3)

The educational purpose of a Support Plan Plus is to “provide evidence of the agreed special educational interventions and other supports to be provided for the child, together with recording parent, student and teacher professional views. A Support Plan Plus also records the strategies that need to be used to enable a child to progress in the educational system”. (NCSE Guidelines May 2006, page vi)

Information included in a Support Plan Plus will include:

- Learning strengths: based on *teacher observation, parent observations, SNA observation ...*
- Learning needs: based on *psychological report, teacher input, parental input, pupil input...*
- Priority Targets for the pupil for a specified period of time
- Strategies to be used to achieve targets
- Biographical details and details of assessments carried out

An agreed format is available for use throughout the school. The agreed default format is available in the school in hard copy and on Aladdin Schools.

A Support Plan Plus may cover various time periods within the school year. Some support Plan Plus documents may be set for shorter periods such as 6 weeks, termly or half yearly. Progress will be reviewed in relation to the targets on an on-going basis according to a schedule set out and agreed in the support Plan Plus.

The co-ordination of the Support Plan Plus will generally be the responsibility of the teacher most involved with meeting the special needs of the child. (Class teacher/ support teacher)

Participants in the preparation of education plans will involve parents and teachers. SNAs, and outside specialists may also be invited to participate.

Participation will be facilitated by arranging for meeting to take place between teaching staff, parents and others. The school will facilitate timetabling arrangements that will facilitate teachers in attending the planning meeting.

A meeting to plan for the Support Plan Plus will be held with relevant staff and parents in Sept. / Oct. of the school year and will be reviewed at Parent/ Teacher meetings and at further review meetings as required. (face to face meetings/telephone discussions where mutual agreement to this process has been established as appropriate)

The parents will be required to call to the school to sign the IEP when it has been prepared following the consultation meeting.

The pupil, depending on circumstances, may be included in the process.

All school staff involved with the pupil have access to a copy of the plan and the plan will be available on request to the parents and if required to relevant agencies such as NEPS and NCSE (taking into consideration GDPR rulings)

If the education plan identifies resources over and above those normally available in a mainstream school setting, the Principal will bring this to the attention of the SENO and/or the NCSE.

The Principal and where appropriate the support staff will be responsible for on-going consultations with psychologists, SENO, and other professionals unless other arrangements have been agreed.

The co-ordination of education plans from class to class and the sharing of relevant information between staff, school and parents will be undertaken by the teacher co-ordinating the IEP. This process will be facilitated by teacher/teacher meetings and through parent/teacher meetings.

### Inclusion

Many practical steps are in place to ensure that pupils with special educational needs are included as fully as possible in the life of the school and the classroom. Pupils with special needs participate actively in all school activities, assemblies, and special occasions. Pupils from the special class integrate with mainstream classes for occasions such as lunch, play-time and specific curricular areas.

Strategies to inculcate in students an awareness of the needs of persons with disabilities used in the school include lessons in RE, SPHE, and specific initiatives such as visiting groups.

### Deployment of Staff

The class teachers play a primary and central role in the provision of educational support for the child in their care. In support of the class teacher the school ensures the most effective deployment of support staff in meeting the overall SEN requirements of the children by taking into account the experience/expertise of teachers and SNAs and by closely examining the particular learning needs from year to year. The Principal, following consultation with staff, allocates teaching and care resources.

The school community has been divided into 4 learning communities as follows, each allocated a team leader;

1. Stage 1-Jun. and Sen. Infant Classes
2. Stage 2 -First and Second Classes
3. Stage 3- Third and Fourth Classes
4. Stage 4- Fifth and Sixth Classes

A support team of SEN teachers and SNAs is allocated to each stage to provide for the needs within each stage. A Stage Leader is appointed to manage and monitor the needs and supports at each stage, always working in close co-operation with all staff within the stage and with the Principal. Regular stage meetings are held to discuss and review issues and plan for the way forward.

SNAs play a vital role in supporting pupils with special needs in the school.

### Collaboration and Communication

- Collaboration between all those involved in the child's education is essential. (*Principal, parents, class teacher, support teachers, SENO, psychologist, health board personnel, and the visiting teacher service*) The Principal and Deputy Principal have a particular role in liaising with outside groups and with organising in-school communication and collaboration.
- It is sometimes necessary to make specific arrangements for formal consultations, although most of this work is carried out informally through incidental meetings and visits.
- Meetings are facilitated between mainstream and support staff regularly.
- Arrangements made under the Croke Park Agreement will further facilitate collaboration and communication.

## Resources

- Individual teachers are grant aided to purchase additional resources suitable for their own case loads.
- All purchases are receipted and receipts are collected and stored.
- All teachers have access to these resources and where practicable resources can be shared.

## Transfer to post-primary

If necessary pupils who require additional support around transition will benefit from cooperation between primary and secondary support staff to enable a smooth transfer to post primary education. A representative from each of the Mallow Post-Primary Schools may visit Scoil Ghobnatan each year to facilitate such transitions. Contact is also made with special schools and visits of staff and pupils arranged as required.

The SENO is informed of all pupils with special needs who are due to transfer.

Educational reports are transferred directly to the receiving Post-Primary Schools. Parental consent is given as part of the Post-Primary Application process.

## Record Keeping

The following records are maintained on children with SEN. The Deputy Principal retains copies of all psychological and other professional reports as well as copies of all applications for support teaching, SNA support and Assistive Technology and support plans. Individual support teachers will compile their own records of on-going work and progress and pass these on when teacher allocations are made for a new school year. (See Section 3 above).

Access to these records may be made available to the following parties: (*Class teacher, support teacher, SENO, psychologist, inspector, parents, special needs assistant, health workers, etc.*) in line with GDPR regulations, Note: Bearing in mind the child's entitlement to confidentiality, access may be on a more restricted basis.

Records of a confidential nature including professional reports are securely stored but are available on request to those entitled to see them.

When a pupil who qualifies for resource teaching leaves the school having completed 6<sup>th</sup> class all files relating to the special education of that pupil will be stored securely with the class reports of that particular year.

## Other Related Policies

The Code of Behaviour/Anti Bullying Policy in place in the school is positively framed and designed so that it can be implemented with all pupils in the school. It stresses good relationships, working together, celebrating our successes and learning from our mistakes in an atmosphere where we all take responsibility for our actions and have pride in our school. Individual behaviour plans are formulated where necessary but they fit into the overall framework outlined in the Code of Behaviour.

The school's curricular and organisational policies and plans take into account the needs of pupils with SEN. *e.g. differentiation of content and methodologies in curriculum areas*

Policy Statements on the following topics:

- Specific Speech and Language Impairment Class
- Assessment Policy
- EBD Enrolment Policy
- Enrolment Policy
- SNA Policy

#### *Success Criteria*

Some practical indicators of the success of this policy include:

- Inclusion of pupils with special needs into our school
- Progress of pupils with special needs in our school as seen in academic assessments and social and emotional development.
- Parental feedback, including feedback as part of the continuum of support.
- Feedback from teaching staff, special needs assistant, pupils, psychologists
- Inspector's Reports

#### *Roles and Responsibility*

People who have particular responsibilities for aspects of the policy include;

- Parents
- DES/NCSE/SENO
- Psychologist and other outside professionals
- School staff
- Board of Management
- In-school Management Team

The Principal and Deputy Principal have the responsibility of drawing up the plan and reviewing it as required, in consultation with other staff members.

Progress will be made when everyone plays their part to the full and offers help and assistance to others, working as a team towards the best possible outcomes for the children in our care.

#### **Professional Development**

Teachers avail of courses organised by Cork Education Support Centre (CESC), Middletown Centre for Autism, Special Educational Support Services, Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and Summer Courses. Resources are provided by Board of Management.

Programmes/Standardised Tests are grant aided by the Department of Education and Skills.

Management of Actual and Potential Aggression (MAPA) training was provided to staff members in 2018 and will be provided again this year 2021. Training was also provided for 2 staff members in the Roots of Empathy Programme in October 2018. In March 2021, staff renewed their training of the Incredible Years Programme which was provided by Cork Education Centre over a four week period online.



### Implementation Date

This policy will apply immediately on ratification by the BOM. The monitoring of its implementation will be overseen by the Principal and Deputy Principal.

### Timetable for Review

The operation of the new policy will be reviewed after a period of no more than three years from date of ratification or subsequent review. Any legislative or administrative changes will be incorporated into the plan as soon as is practicable.

The policy will be posted on the school website [www.scoilghobnatan.com](http://www.scoilghobnatan.com)

Reviewed: March 2021

Ratified at BOM: 18/05/2021

Chairperson: James Stanton Date: 18/05/2021

Chairperson B.O.M James Stanton

Principal: Donal O'Shea Date: 18/05/2021

Principal Donal O'Shea

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **The Continuum of Support for Children with Special Educational Needs.**

**Stage 1:** Procedures followed by class and support teachers for the early identification of enrolled pupils who may have special educational needs or learning difficulties.

- The academic, physical, social, behavioural or emotional development of pupils will be monitored through teacher observation, parental observations, use of simple teacher designed checklists.
- Concerns regarding a pupil's progress are noted by class teacher using observation, check lists and/or test copy and appropriate interventions are put in place.
- The screening measures that are generally used in the school include the MIST Screening Test, and the standardised reading and maths tests (Drumcondra Reading and SIGMA-T Maths) are reviewed. Other tests for individual pupils may be administered in consultation with the relevant support teacher or the Deputy Principal. These include measures to determine levels of general ability and measures to determine academic performance.
- Where particular concerns arise parents/guardians are contacted with a view to exchanging relevant information and agreeing on a plan of action which may include classroom adjustments and adaptations to teaching and learning, parental input in the home, and referral to outside agencies such as GP, medical clinic, family services etc. Actions to be taken will be recorded by the class teacher on a Classroom Support Plan.
- If necessary the class teachers can seek advice from senior management in the school or from other support teachers. (checklists and tip sheets available from support teachers).
- If initial in-class interventions do not bring sufficient improvement the child may be moved onto Stage 2 following consultation with parents, principal, SEN teacher(s) as well as the class teacher, subject to the child meeting any requirements set out under the Learning Support Guidelines of the DES.
- If concerns seem to warrant the provision of support from outside agencies such as Speech and language and Occupational Therapy in consultation with the parents, having obtained written parental consent. (in line with GDPR requirements).

**Stage 2.** Referral to Special Educational Support Teacher

- Supplementary teaching will be provided following assessment results, teacher recommendation, parents' concerns, and in the light of the availability of resources.
- Parental consent is given for screening and diagnostic testing if required at the beginning of each school year.
- Early contact with parents to explain how learning support can address their child's learning needs will be made. A standard consent form is used but individual meetings with parents will be arranged whenever possible. Acceptance or refusal of service will be recorded. In the case of refusal further consultation will be sought to clarify any difficulties or concerns.
- Supplementary teaching is provided by a team of teachers employed under the following headings: SEN, EAL specific allocation, Special Class Teacher.
- Over the years various time-tabling arrangements have been used with the aims of maximising support for individual pupils and minimising disruption to classroom teachers. Decisions regarding the overall arrangements are made by the principal and

deputy principal in consultation with stage leaders and support teaching team on an annual basis taking into account how well previous arrangements have succeeded. In the junior classes there will be a focus on in class intervention in the area of literacy using the Literacy Lift Off model of support with staff and parents working in collaboration.

- Criteria for Support Teaching-when the class teachers have scored the standardised tests in the month of May/ June support will be offered to pupils who have scored at or under the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile ( as per Learning Support Guidelines)in Maths / Reading in the following school year . Should staffing allow, support teaching will be given to pupils who have scored above this but who are deemed to be in need of some support. This may take the form of continuous learning support teaching, in-class support or a block of learning support sessions.
- Actions to be taken will be recorded on a School Support Plan/Group Plan.

### **Stage 3. Consultation or referral for assessment to outside specialist**

A decision to request an assessment by an outside specialist will only be made following consultation with the parent/s or legal guardians and the acquisition of written parental consent (GDPR).

Procedure for referring a pupil for assessment:

- Referral to Psychology Service NEPS by Principal/Deputy Principal
- Referral to private psychologist by parents or Principal
- Referral to Early Intervention for Assessment of Need by HSE
- Application to SENO by Principal/Deputy Principal
- Referral to paediatrician, child psychiatry by GP or NEPS
- Referral to Speech and Language Therapist by parent or by school
- Referral to occupational Therapist by Principal/Deputy Principal
- Referral to audiologist etc. by Public Health Nurse

Documentation required will be completed by the pupil's teachers and will be submitted to the Principal and a copy kept on file.

In the event of limited availability of assessments through NEPS the Principal, following consultation with all concerned will decide on priority cases. Severity of need will be a prime consideration, as will such factors as securing future school placement and securing additional educational and/or care supports.

Where parents have had assessments carried out privately, the recommendations of such assessments will be considered by the school having regard to the criteria and guidelines set out by the NCSE from time to time and the available resources within the school. The school reserves the right to make resources available to those pupils who clearly need additional supports but who have not yet been able to avail of an outside assessment.