

# SEN Policy



## Introduction & Rationale

Our aim in St. Joseph's Community College, a school community comprised of Management, Teachers, SNAs and students together with their parents and guardians as education partners, is to be a truly inclusive school. Our students with Special Educational Needs are valued, nurtured, included and the diversity of their learning and care needs are met by all staff under the Guidance of the SEN Coordinator, SET Team, our SET teachers and a trained and a highly valued SNA Team. Commitment of all teaching staff throughout the school ensures that each student's potential is met.

### 1.1 Mission Statement

Our school endeavours to nurture students' gifts and talents in a learning community that is supportive, inclusive and creative. Everyone is encouraged to achieve their full academic and personal potential, while developing habits that instil lifelong learning.

### 1.2 Introduction

St. Joseph's Community College provides a caring, nurturing, safe and supportive environment, with positive teacher-student relationships. Everyone is supported to reach his/her full academic and social potential based on our core values of care, equality, respect, community & excellence in education.

The Special Educational Needs Department in our school endeavours to provide a positive learning environment, which will foster the academic, social and emotional development of students with Special Educational Needs to realise their individual potential.

This policy is concerned with supporting students with Special Educational Needs and explains the school's provision for them, in the wider context of legislation and the ethos of St. Joseph's Community College.

## 1.3 Definitions of SEN

Section One of the Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 defines special education and inclusion in the following terms:

Special Education Needs are defined as:

***‘a restriction in the capacity of a 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’***

The EPSEN act also states:

***‘A child with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs unless those needs of the child is such that to do so would be inconsistent with***

***A. The best interests of the child as determined in accordance with any assessment carried out under this Act***

***or***

***B. The effective provision for education for children with whom the child to be educated’***

## 1.4 School Ethos

The warm, friendly, and caring atmosphere of St. Joseph’s Community College arises from the high value placed on relationships between students, staff, and parents. Everyone is supported to reach his/her full academic and social potential based on our core values of care, equality, respect, equality, community and excellence in education.

Inclusivity is nurtured. The school is committed to enabling each student to reach their individual potential. Difference and diversity are valued and social, moral and civic values are promoted.

## 1.5 Aims

These aims are implemented in the daily transactions between management, staff, students, and the wider school community:

***The Special Education Needs Department of St. Joseph’s Community College seeks to:***

- Ensure that the student with the greatest need accesses the greatest level of support
- Provide students with consistent opportunities to experience success
- Provide supplementary teaching and additional support in literacy and numeracy
- Provide in class support (based on assessment of need)
- Involve parents/guardians in the support of their child’s education.
- Promote collaboration among teachers in the implementation of a whole school policy on learning support for students

- Protect and enhance the self-esteem of the learner and to help the student to develop the skills they need to continue learning in adult life
- Provide educational support(s) to enable students with special educational needs to function as independently as possible in society
- Ensure students have access to assistive technology to support their learning throughout the curriculum
- Ensure students who access the special class are included in the life of the school, so far as possible, in mainstream classes and with their peers

## 1.6 Guiding Legislation

*This policy takes cognisance of the following legislation:*

- The Education Act (1998)
- The Equal Status Act (2000)
- The Equality Act (2004)
- The Education Welfare Act (2000)
- The Data Protection Act (2018)
- The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004)
- Circular 0064/2024- 'The Operation/application and deployment of Special Education Teacher Resources'
- Circular 0032/2025: Special Needs Assistant Allocation 2025/26
- Circular 0039/2025: Approach and key measures to support the Forward Planning for Special Education Provision for the 2026/2027 school year and beyond
- Circular 0003/2014: The Special Needs Assistant (SNA) scheme to support teachers in meeting the care needs of some children with special educational needs, arising from a disability
- Circular 0005/2025: Special Education Teacher (SET) allocation for the 2025/26 school year
- Circular 0084/2024: Advice on the use of assessment instruments/tests for Guidance or for additional and special educational needs (SEN) in post-primary schools
- Circular 03/2024 (Post Primary) Special Education Teacher (SET) allocation model and the calculation of the SET allocation for each school from 2024/25

## 1.7 Supporting Publications

*The following publications were consulted in writing this policy:*

- Guidelines for Post Primary Schools: Supporting Young People with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Classes.
- Autism: Good Practice Guidelines for Schools: Supporting Children and Young People (DES, 2022)
- Exemptions from the Study of Irish: Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools (English -Medium) August 2022
- Indicators of Effective Practice for Post-Primary Schools- Supporting Young People with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Classes

## **1.8 Child Welfare**

St. Joseph's Community College has a Child Safeguarding Statement. This is available on our website. The statement applies the Safeguarding to all students and staff.

- The Designated Liaison person is Ms. Stacey McDermott
- The Deputy Designated Liaison Person is Ms. Ashley Dennigan

The B.O.M recognises that Child Protection and welfare considerations permeate all aspects of school life and must be reflected in all the school policies, practices and activities.

Each member of staff has completed the Child Protection Programme with Oide.

Due to the close working relationship and duties that are intrinsic to the provision of support to the students with SEN, child protection procedures are to the forefront of all interactions between staff and students.

## **1.9 Wellbeing**

All students in our Junior Cycle experience wellbeing embedded across the curriculum. Wellbeing allows students to explore areas of interest. Students with SEN are encouraged to participate in wellbeing classes and activities as much as possible.

Students with SEN may experience a range of social, emotional and mental health problems which can often create a barrier to learning. Support, with routines, SNA provision and SEN integration, social stories and movements are in place to support those who need it, for emotional regulation and social interactions.

## **1.10 Health and Safety**

Every staff member and student is entitled to a safe, secure environment and to be treated with due respect. All appropriate measures are taken to ensure the safety of each student with SEN. When a place is offered to a child with SEN, every effort will be made to ensure that the supports to which the child is entitled are in place as soon as possible. Staff members will be informed of any potential risks and, where necessary, individual plans will be drawn up and implemented.

## **1.11 Rationale**

The following principles will be adhered to in the creation of a whole-school approach to provision of support for SEN students:

- Compliance with Legislation
- Resources provided to support students with SEN will be used to facilitate the development of a truly inclusive school.

- Support provided to students with SEN will be based on identified needs and be informed by regular reviews of progress (in consultation with teachers, parents/guardians and students) as outlined in the Continuum of Support Guidelines.
- The subject teacher has primary responsibility for the progress and care of all students in the classroom, including students with SEN.
- SET support provided to the school will be used solely for the support of students with SEN, including those for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL).
- The school will aim to provide students with the greatest level of need, access to the greatest level of support, and wherever possible, those students will be supported by teachers with relevant expertise who can provide continuity of support.
- The school will aim to establish and maintain a core team of teachers to meet the needs of SEN students. All members will be offered access to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to support the diverse needs of students with SEN
- Provide practical guidance to staff and parents about SEN procedures, practises and classroom interventions

## **Categories of SEN and the SEN Team**

### **2.1 Categories of SEN**

The various categories of special educational needs, the definitions of these categories, and the criteria for the allocation of additional resources and the procedures for application are SET by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) are as follows:

- Students who have significantly greater difficulty in their learning than their peer group
- Students with a sensory (including hearing or visual impairment) or physical disability
- Students experiencing emotional and/or behaviour difficulties in the long or short term
- Students diagnosed with a general learning difficulty
- Students diagnosed with Autism
- Students with additional educational needs arising from an assessed syndrome
- Students who have English as a Second Language
- Students with Exceptional ability

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

### **2.2.1 Board of Management**

The BOM oversees the development, implementation and review on a regular basis of SEN policy. The BOM is responsible for:

- Ensuring that the school has a comprehensive SEN policy in place
- Monitoring the implementation of the SEN policy
- Promoting the development of positive partnerships with parents/guardians and other relevant bodies /personnel

### **2.2.2 Senior Leadership Team (SLT)**

Under current legislation, the Principal and the Deputy of the school have the overall responsibility for ensuring that the additional needs of the student are met.

In St. Joseph's Community College, the practical organisation of the provision is delegated to the Principal, Deputy Principal, SENCO & SET Team, these roles include:

- Overall responsibility for the development and implementation of the school's policies and procedures relating to the inclusion of students with special educational needs
- Overseeing a whole-school approach to assessment and screening to identify needs and to guide the allocation of appropriate supports
- Ensuring effective engagement with feeder schools to support the transition of students with additional educational needs
- Co-ordinating and allocation of duties/timetables of SNAs.
- Facilitating the continuing professional development of all teachers in relation to the education of students with SEN and ensure that all school staff (subject teachers and additional education teachers, guidance counsellors, special needs assistants) are clear regarding their roles and responsibilities in this area
- Ensuring that whole-school procedures are established to facilitate the effective involvement of parents, students and external professionals/agencies
- Implementing the new resource allocation model, the Principal will give careful consideration to the formation of an SEN team whose members have expertise and/or interest in special education so that provision can be coordinated efficiently and flexibly to meet a range of needs.

### **2.2.3 Classroom Teachers**

The mainstream teacher has the primary responsibility for ensuring that all students, including those with SEN are provided with a learning programme and environment that enables equitable access to the curriculum. At the beginning of each school year, the SEN Coordinator updates a register of information focusing on the incoming first years with SEN. This information is shared on our internal Share Point system (and is password protected) and all teachers are made aware of its existence at the start-of-year staff meeting and encouraged to consult it regularly.

Classroom teachers are responsible for:

- Making themselves aware of the students with special educational needs in all of their classes using the SEN register available on the teacher's area of Sharepoint.
- Viewing the Student Support Plan of each student in their class. Aiming to reach targets set to support the individualised learning style and progress for each student on the register
- Liaising with the SENCO for additional information from a student's file if required
- Being part of a whole school approach to helping those with SEN
- Looking and availing of CPD opportunities where needed
- Providing feedback to the SEN Team with regards to a student's progress

- Showing sensitivity to the needs of the students when assessing, reporting and recording student progress on reports
- Where a student has access to an SNA, the classroom teacher will work with the SNA to effectively support the student in the classroom
- Ensuring that gifted students are challenged and are supported to reach their full potential through meaningful feedback, higher order questioning and differentiated tasks to match their ability
- Making provision for students with additional needs in their classes including the use of Assistive Technology and differentiated classwork and homework as appropriate

Differentiation can be achieved by:

- Adapting and utilising resources, including use of Assistive Technology
- Varying the level, structure, mode of instruction and pace of lessons to meet individual needs.
- Adapting lessons for students' interests
- Matching tasks and processes to students' abilities and needs
- Aspiring towards suitably challenging learning outcomes and assessing accordingly.

#### **2.2.4 SEN Co-ordinator**

The SEN Coordinator is responsible for:

- Formulating, implementing and reviewing SEN policy.
- Administrative duties including Assistive Applications along with core SET team
- Maintaining a school register of students with SEN for teachers
- Communicating the needs of students to teachers
- Assist the Principal in the allocation of resources
- Overseeing the applications for Reasonable Accommodations at State Exams (RACE)
- Liaising with outside professionals (i.e.. Educational Psychologist, Visiting teachers)
- Liaising with parents/guardians to plan for student's progress, making arrangements for planning, implementation and review of student support plans.
- Ensure SET Department avail of relevant CPD in the area of SEN and communicate with staff (teachers and SNAs) about relevant courses and CPD to maintain highest standards in the school and inclusion
- Organising the management, procurement and maintenance of specialised resources (including Sensory Materials and Assistive Technology)
- Liaising with primary schools of incoming first years and assessment (MALT & PPAD-E) interpretation to identify needs

\*These duties are reviewed regularly and may change to ensure the priority needs of the department are met.

### **2.2.5 SET Core Team**

The role of the SEN Core Team includes:

- Supporting the SENCO in assessing students with additional needs and updating the SEN Register
- Setting targets and identifying priority support needs. Developing a Student Support File for use in the SEN dept. and an educational profile for subject teachers to enable them to devise appropriate methodologies in the mainstream class.
- Execute support strategies from SSP and monitor progress from same.
- Implementing appropriate supports by withdrawing students and co-teaching
- On-going engagement with parents, by means of Parental Questionnaire at the start of the year, email interaction, Parent-Teacher meetings and phone calls as required.
- Liaising with subject teachers to support them in providing appropriate provision for the student in the mainstream class.
- Attending a weekly SEN meeting with the SENCO and SEN team
- Participate in short meetings with relevant professionals in the best interests of the student e.g. psychologists, occupational therapists, support agencies.
- Development and delivery, or the organisation of delivery, of Student Support Files
- Development and delivery of in-school CPD at staff meetings.
- May provide support to a student in class, as a withdrawal or through co-teaching.
- To advise SNA's around the care needs of relevant students.

### **2.2.6 Role of the Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)**

The role of the SNA is an enabling role. The SNA works under the direction of the class teacher, to support students' inclusion, along with assisting with transitions and care needs including the administration of medication if required. The SNA supports students in the area of communication. This includes assistance with Assistive Technology. The SNA monitors and reports pertinent information to the relevant teacher, SEN Dept and meets with the SEN Coordinator to ensure that the students' needs are best met. The role of the SNA is collaborative. The SNA is a respected and valued member of the multidisciplinary team approach within the school.

### **2.2.7 Role of Parent(s)/Guardian(s)**

Parental involvement includes:

- Providing feedback through focus groups, surveys or communications with the SENCO, SEN team and/or any other member of the student support team.
- Providing the school with documentation, where it exists such as educational reports, psychological reports, medical reports, exemption documentation and assessments
- Liaison with the SENCO as soon as possible when a change in behaviour and/or emotional state has been identified.

- The school journal is used for home-school communication, and parent-teacher meetings are held once a year for face to face communication.
- Parents help the school by keeping the teachers informed of the progress/difficulties they observe in their child's learning as they progress through post primary school. This should include showing an interest in the completion of homework and familiarising themselves with approaches taken in school.
- Parents receive a school report about their child's academic performance three times throughout the school year following the week 11, 22 and 33 assessments
- Regular communication is available to SEN Co-Ordinator on request.

### **2.2.7 Role of Students**

The involvement of students in the development, implementation and review of their own progress in an important principle that underpins effective SEN provision.

Students are encouraged to:

- Take ownership of the skills and strategies that are developed to meet their needs. Students are consulted and help with the development of their learning targets.
- Become active participants in school life such as extra-curricular activities and focus groups
- Reach out for support when needed
- The SEN Department involves students in assessments and discussions around their learning needs.

***The school believes that achievements are maximised when students take ownership of their learning***

## Identification of SEN and the Continuum of Support

### Identification of SEN

This section sets out a three-step process to guide identification, intervention and monitoring of outcomes for students with special educational needs. In St. Joseph's Community College, we will use the **DES Continuum of Support** framework to engage in this three-step process. This framework recognises that SEN occurs along a continuum, ranging from mild to severe, from transient to long term, and that students require different levels of support depending on their individual needs.

Many students will have their special educational needs identified prior to their transfer to post primary school. The school's admissions policy outlines the procedures for enrolment of students with SEN. At the Enrolment Night for prospective parents the importance of completing the specific SEN section of the Enrolment Form is outlined. The transfer of information from primary level to post primary level is vital to the successful support of students with SEN.

Once accepted into St. Joseph's Community College:

- All incoming first year students take the PPAD- E and MALT Stage 3 test. These tests can also be used to identify strengths and needs of incoming students with SEN. This data is used to help identify students who may need additional support, including exceptionally able students.
- Once students' needs have been identified, an SEN register is compiled and shared with all subject teachers. We deploy SEN teachers in a variety of ways in order to effectively meet students' needs. We aim to strike a balance between in class support, group and individual support while ensuring that the needs of students with additional needs are met inclusively. The student with the highest level of need has access to the greatest level of support.
- The SEN team will ascertain the students' learning style and strengths and develop a Student Support File (SSF) for each student with SEN who has been allocated specific support by the NCSE guidelines. A PSP (Personal Student Plan) is devised for any student who has Primary Care Needs

### Students with Emerging Needs:

For students with emerging needs, including the exceptionally able, the concern may be identified through monitoring systems such as:

- Formal Assessment: PPAD-E & MALT
- Class tests and school exams
- Teacher observations
- SEN Team observations
- SNA Team observations
- Parental concern
- Educational reports presented to the school
- Meetings with NEPS and other external agencies

## **Students transferring into other Year Groups**

When a student is accepted into a year group other than First Year, information is sought from their previous school (Educational Psychological report, School reports, attendance, etc) Any relevant information is then passed to the Year Head and the Special Needs Co-ordinator.

The SET Department meets once a week under the leadership of the SENCO. The next steps for referred student will be on the agenda and assessment and provision organised accordingly.

## **Meeting Needs / The Continuum of Support**

Having identified students who need support, the next step is to allocate SET supports. The allocation of SET supports is in accordance with identified needs, ensuring those with the highest level of need have access to the greatest level of support.

The continuum of Support Guidelines identifies the needs as follows:

1. Whole School & Classroom Support for All
2. School Support for Some
3. School Support Plus for a Few

### **Support for All**

The Special Educational Needs of the majority of students within a mainstream class are met by differentiating teaching approaches, use of Assistive Technology (Microsoft Teams, Chromebooks and multimedia) and Team Teaching.

### **Support for Some**

At the level of the Support for Some, Student Support Plans (SSPs) are devised and implemented for students identified as having SEN, as appropriate.

Some students may be withdrawn on an individual or small group basis.

### **Support for a Few**

Again, at this level Student Support Plans (SSPs) are devised and implemented for students identified as having SEN, as appropriat

These students tend to be withdrawn in small groups.

## **Student Support Files/Plans**

We use a Student Support Files/Plans (SSF/SSP) that facilitate us in documenting progress and needs over time and assists us in providing an appropriate level of support to students, in line with their level of need. Our Student Support File is based on the NEPS template and is stored on the SEN section of Sharepoint. All teachers have access to the SEN register which outlines strengths, targets and strategies for each student on the register. Confidential and sensitive information is only accessible to Management and SET Department.

## **Exemptions from Irish**

Exemptions from the study of Irish are governed by Circular 55/2022, which outlines the different classifications of SEN that are eligible for an exemption. Exemptions to the study of a modern foreign languages are not automatically granted with the receipt of an Irish exemption as it can significantly impact a student's options for study at third level education. Modern foreign language exemptions may be granted by the school principal following consultation with the guidance counsellor, parents/guardians and the students. Should a student be granted an exemption, a form of informed consent must be signed by all parties

## **Assistive Technology**

Assistive Technology comprises a range of technologies that support students with ALN. The ALN Team makes applications which must include a recommendation on a psychological report, to the NCSE via the SENO and grants are available to those students the NCSE approves.

## **Accommodations in State Exams**

The Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations at the Certificate Examinations (RACE) facilitates access to candidates who would have difficulty accessing the examination or communicating what they know to the examiner because of a physical, visual, hearing or learning difficulty.

RACE applications are made in 3<sup>rd</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> Year for reasonable accommodations for state exams.

All applications for RACE are made by the SEN Department and the necessary support documentation (e.g. evidence of supports including AT that the student currently uses are taken into account) is prepared by the SEN Team in the months ahead of the exams before the application deadline.

## **3.3 Outside Agencies**

Students in St. Joseph's Community College who are in need of further support may have these met through access from:

- National Council for Special Education (NCSE)
- Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO)
- National Educational Psychology Service (NEPS)
- HSE Multidisciplinary Team, including Psychology Services
- Visiting Teacher Service (Visual and Hearing Impairment)
- TUSLA: Child and Family Agency / Education Welfare Officer (EWO)

## **Special Class Provision**

The Special Class(es) in St. Joseph's Community College cater for students with a diagnosis of Autism. St. Joseph's Community College endeavours to enable all students assigned to a special class to belong to an educational community without prejudice. Individual differences are celebrated. The class(es) reflect the inclusive ethos of our school and wherever possible the students in the Autism Class(es) are integrated within the mainstream school.

### **Aims of the Special Class**

The purpose of the class(es) is to assist students with Autism to leave school with the skills necessary to participate, to the best of their ability, in an inclusive way in society and to live independent and fulfilled lives.

Specialist teaching approaches used in the special class will be tailored to suit the student's individual needs, which vary in nature. Reflective practice will take place to create a learning environment that optimises the wellbeing, learning and participation of students with autism. Some of the practices used will be useful for students across the school with Autism and SEN.

### **Admissions**

See St. Joseph's Community College Admissions Policy

### **Teachers Supporting in the Autism Class(es)**

Teachers supporting in the Autism Class(es) prepare a scheme of work for the students timetabled for their classes. Each plan is differentiated to cater for the individual needs of each student. We understand the need to promote independence within the class and aim to get the most from our students.

### **Mainstream teachers**

Students in the special class attend classes alongside their peers to the greatest extent possible. Each mainstream teacher is aware of the individual student needs in their class. The SEN register provides details of the strengths, needs, learning style and priority learning targets of each student in order to set targets, differentiate and adapt their teaching methodologies.

### **Curriculum and Integration**

Interventions for all students with additional needs, including autism, are guided by the Continuum of Support Process.

Environmental Adaptations and teaching strategies in a special class may require greater levels of differentiation and individualisation to support students with more significant needs.

These include:

- Structured, quiet classroom with a space free from distractions
- Visual Teaching Methodologies, including timetables

- Alternative and Augmentative (AAC) Communication, as appropriate
- Opportunity to master skills (Task Analysis)
- Coaching to enabling generalisation of skills

Some students attending the Special Class in St. Joseph's Community College are dual enrolled and attend mainstream classes as far as possible. The SEN Department may assign relevant supports for students with SEN. This is to enable these students to integrate into the mainstream classes so as they can be taught alongside their peers with the majority of their learning taking place there.

During time in the Special Class, students have access to an extended curriculum, (either individually or in a small group setting, where they will receive social and life skills training, a sensory and/or stress management strategies). Students will also benefit from pre and/or post tutoring of mainstream subjects.

Level 2 Junior Cycle For those students who are not able to take the existing Junior Certificate, the Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LPs) will be designed for students with particular special educational needs. These programmes are designed to provide meaningful learning and experiences for students who have general learning disabilities in the higher functioning moderate and low functioning mild categories. These programmes are set in the context of the 5 keys principles, (Communication and Language, Living in the Community, Numeracy, Personal Care and Preparing for Work) and 24 statements of learning that frame the new Junior Cycle. For those students completing the level 2 programme, it is the responsibility of all teachers to plan and assess those students.

### **The Individualised Timetable**

Students in the Special Class operate from an individualised timetable. The number of academic subjects undertaken is wholly dependent on their needs and abilities. Activities in the Special class are also individualised. Each student's timetable is constantly under review and changes can be made throughout the academic year.

### **Transition from Primary to the Post Primary Special Class**

For some students with additional needs, it is helpful to begin preparation for the transfer to post-primary school in advance. This is especially true for students with Autism, who can find a change to their routine stressful. Ensuring that students have the skills to cope with these changes, the SEN Department, along with parents, primary school and the student, work together to make this transition a positive experience.

The following Transitional Programme is available:

- Visit school during Open Night
- Liaison between SEN Special Class Teacher and Primary Teacher
- Visit to Primary School
- School visit and subject taster day
- Transition to Post-Primary School booklet / Social Story

## Implementation and Review

This plan will be implemented from Autumn 2025. It will be reviewed every 2 years.

This policy was ratified on \_\_\_\_\_

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(Chairperson)



