



JOHN SCOTTUS SECONDARY SCHOOL

OLD CONNA, FERNDAL ROAD, RATHMICHAEL, CO. DUBLIN.

TEL: (01) 6680828.

E-MAIL: SECONDARY@JOHNSCOTTUS.IE WEB: WWW.JOHNSCOTTUS.IE

John Scottus Secondary School

Special Educational Needs Policy

Approved by the Board of Management on 6/6/19.

John Scottus School offers a vision of education which gives young people the self mastery, strength of character and compassion to contribute meaningfully to the world around them whilst at the same time fulfilling their own unique set of talents and qualities.

It is an education based on the belief that each child can come to discover their innate gifts, that each child can come to contribute something exceptional and that each child has at their heart a limitless potential.

Central to the ethos of the school is the development of character. Character building is described as the development of good habits such as the ability to be still and self-aware, to attend to the present moment, to participate in the spirit of enquiry and to unite with others around. These habits of attention, enquiry, stillness and unity will provide the foundations for academic excellence, a life of meaningful purpose and a life journey of Self-Discovery.

Mindfulness along with philosophy and meditation are considered the three key aspects in the journey of character building and the development of these habits. The mindful motto of the school is "Delight in the present" and the belief is that when a child comes to know their true Self it is possible to delight in the present every moment of every day.

1. Introduction:

This Special Educational Needs policy has been formulated in compliance with the Education Act (1998), Education (Welfare) Act (2000), Equal Status Acts (2000 to 2011), Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) (2004) and Disability Act (2005) to contribute to the realisation of our mission statement;

"To give young people the self mastery, strength of character and compassion to contribute meaningfully to the world around them whilst at the same time fulfilling their own unique set of talents and qualities ."

It draws heavily upon Circular No 0014/2017 entitled "Special Education Teaching Allocation" (DES, 2017a) and the "Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools: Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools" (DES, 2017b). In particular, the aim of special education at John Scottus is to educate students with special educational needs in an inclusive environment and to assist them to leave school with the skills necessary to participate to their full potential in an inclusive way in the social and economic activities of society and to live independent and fulfilled lives. Effective provision for students identified as having special educational needs is situated within an inclusive whole-school framework which emphasises both effective teaching and learning for all and good collaboration between the school, parents/guardians and students.

2. Definition

The Education for Special Needs Act (2004) defines "special education needs":

A restriction in the capacity of a person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, mental health or learning disability or any other condition which results in a person learning differently than a person without that condition.

The students who fall within the Special Needs definition include

- Pupils with learning difficulties and disorders
- Pupils with physical and sensory disabilities
- Pupils with emotional and behavioural disorders
- Pupils with other special needs

3. Child Protection Procedures

This Special Educational Needs policy shall be implemented in compliance with current legislation, circulars and procedures issued by the Department of Education and Skills and school policies and procedures relating to Child Protection.

4. Organisation of Students

The allocation of students to classes at John Scottus within each year group is primarily based on the random, as opposed to hierarchical, allocation of students to classes. Accordingly, in line with the principles of inclusive education, classes comprise of 'mixed ability' groupings. Hence, students benefit from 'mixed-ability' teaching which has beneficial effects for all students and helps promote social and personal development.

5. Special Education Teaching Resources

5.1 Physical resources

John Scottus is currently building up its resources to meet the special educational needs of its students. This enables the school to address the special educational needs of its students through a blend of within class support, small group support and withdrawal of students, as appropriate to the needs of each student.

5.2 Deployment of Special Education teaching resources

Special education teaching resources are deployed in an optimum manner at John Scottus to improve both the learning experiences of and educational outcomes for students identified as having special educational needs. In deploying special education resources, the over-riding principle is that these resources are deployed to address identified needs of students whilst ensuring those with the highest level of need have access to the greatest level of support. Accordingly;

- Learning support and resource teaching is allocated to students in line with their needs whilst ensuring that those with the greatest need receive the highest level of support. This model of support is based on the students' needs and is informed by regular reviews of progress and ongoing consultation.
- Additional special educational needs supports are tailored to meet the unique needs of students, addressing social, emotional as well as literacy and mathematical needs. The supports address the specific needs of the students following consultation with relevant teachers, parents, professionals as necessary and the students themselves.

5.3 Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

All teachers have responsibility for teaching students with special educational needs. Consequently, it is important that all staff members engage in appropriate Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to develop the capacity of the school to meet the educational needs of all students.

5.4 Outside agencies

In meeting the special educational needs of its students, the school draws on support from relevant outside agencies including the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), a Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO), The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Support Service, The Inspectorate and allied health professionals, as appropriate.

6. Continuum of support

At John Scottus, a continuum of support process which uses a problem-solving model to determine the special educational needs of students, devise appropriate interventions to meet these needs and review their implementation is employed. These needs can include academic, social and emotional needs, as well as needs associated with physical, sensory, language and communication difficulties. The levels of intervention inherent to this continuum of support are illustrated in Figure. 1 below.

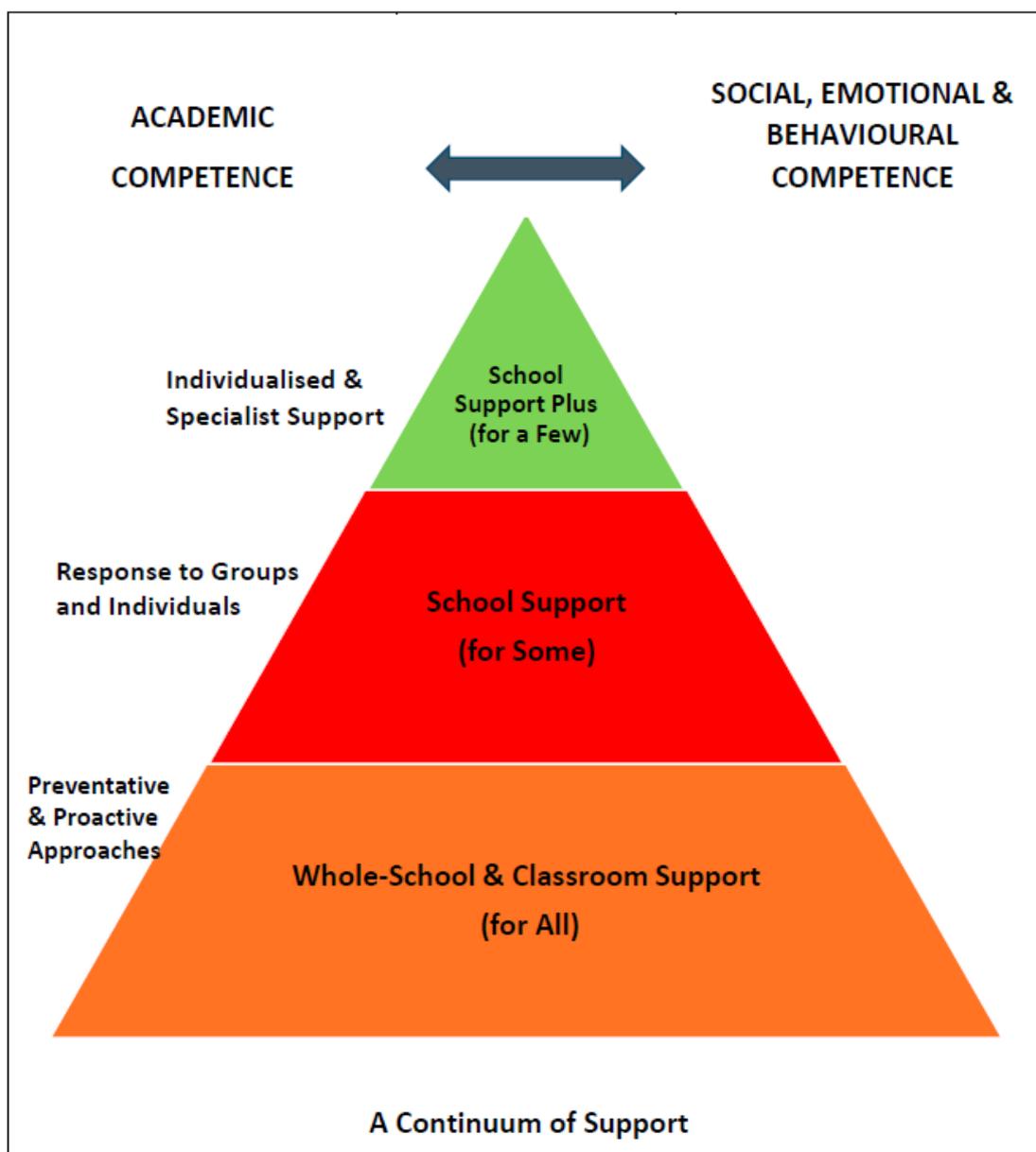


Fig. 1 A Continuum of Support (Reproduced from (DES, 2017b, p. 9))

Arising from the implementation of the continuum of support, the special educational needs of the majority of students within a mainstream class are met by differentiating teaching approaches, constituting Support for All. Additionally, some students are supported in their classes with additional special education teachers providing within class support, namely School Support (for Some). Furthermore, some students may be withdrawn on an individual or small group basis for intensive teaching of skills, that is School Support Plus (for a Few). Hence the model of support embraces the three distinct school-based processes comprising Support for All, Support for Some and Support for a Few. The principle of providing students with the greatest levels of need access to the greatest level of support underpins the implementation of this continuum of support and the level of support individual students receive varies as they move along the continuum.

Furthermore, in implementing the continuum of support, the school adopts a three- step process to meeting the needs of students with special educational needs. These involve:

- (i) The identification of students who have special educational needs.
- (ii) Interventions for students identified as having special educational needs.
- (iii) Monitoring of outcomes for students identified as having special educational needs.

The above mentioned three steps are elaborated upon in sections 7, 8 and 9 that follow, respectively.

7. Identification of students who have special educational needs

7.1 Identification of existing students at the school for support.

In identifying students for support, the school takes into account the following:

- Standardised tests are used to screen and identify students' performance in reading and maths. Those students performing below 10th percentile are prioritised for support in literacy and numeracy.
- Students who are identified as having significant needs through a process of ongoing assessment and intervention as set out in the Continuum of Support Process (DES, 2007b).
- Students 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 and students who have specific learning disabilities.
- Students with significant Special Educational Needs such as those identified as having significant learning, behavioural, emotional, physical and sensory needs.
- The needs of students who may present with a range of learning whose interaction may present a significant barrier to the students' learning and ability to access the curriculum.
- Students who have additional literacy or language learning needs including those students who need additional English as an Additional Language Support.

7.2 Identification of incoming first year students for support

In identifying incoming first year students for support, the school takes into account the following:

- Incoming first year students completes the Cognitive Abilities Test (CAT4) during the first term of the school year.
- Each primary school is informed when any student attending such a school has been enrolled at John Scottus for the following school year and requested to transfer relevant educational passports and other information that may be deemed appropriate to the latter.
- The Principal meets the parent(s)/guardian(s) of incoming first year students where any concerns relating to a student can be discussed.
- Where a special educational need is identified, the school conducts special needs case meetings in person and/or over the phone with the parent(s)/guardian(s), Principal and Learning Support teacher, as appropriate.
- Copies of any relevant psychological reports and assessment results are sought to inform the identification process.
- A general reading test is conducted to identify the reading ages of the group.
- The results of the CAT4 and General Reading tests are analysed. This analysis combined with available assessment test results, information from parents and feeder primary schools and parents & guardians form the basis for prioritising students for support.

8. Provision or intervention for students identified as having special educational needs

Learning support provision is seen in the context of a whole school approach. The Special Needs Team takes primary responsibility for learning support provision and provides information to subject teachers as necessary. The aim of each teacher is to develop the individual student to his/her full potential. In addition to this:

- The special educational needs of the majority of students within a mainstream class are met by differentiating teaching approaches (Support for All).
- Where students continue to present with significant difficulties, despite whole- school interventions (such as differentiated teaching, a mentoring programme or social skills group), School Support (for Some) is initiated.
- At the level of Support for Some, educational support plans are devised and implemented for students identified as having special educational needs, as appropriate. These are differentiated in line with the individual needs of students and include clear, measurable learning targets, and specify the resources and targeted interventions that are used to address student needs in line with the continuum of support process.
- Individualised educational support plans for students are developed on an informed basis through a collaborative process involving relevant teachers, parents/guardians, the students themselves and outside professionals, as necessary.
- Support for Some can take the form of an addition teacher providing within class support and small group and individual withdrawal.
- In circumstances where meeting the special educational needs of students requires more than Support for Some, School Support Plus (for a Few) is initiated.
- At the level of School Support Plus (for a Few), subject teacher(s), parents/guardians and special education teachers, in collaboration with outside agencies, as required, engage in a more detailed and systematic approach to information gathering and assessment. This involves using a broad range of formal and informal assessment and diagnostic tools, including teacher observation, student interview, measures of cognitive ability and social, emotional, behavioural and adaptive functioning, as appropriate.
- Data generated from the initiation of School Support Plus (for a Few) is used to devise and implement a Support Plan to meet the needs of the associated student. This data also serves as a baseline against which to map progress. A Support Plan at this level is more detailed,

individualised, and involves longer term planning and consultation than those at other levels of support.

- The school applies for “Reasonable Accommodations at the Certificate Examinations” for students identified as having special educational needs, as appropriate.

9. Monitoring of outcomes for students identified as having special educational needs

To optimise the implementation of interventions, supports provided to students identified as having special educational needs are informed by a tracking and recording system. Specifically:

- Student Support Plans specify time-frames for review. These reviews are implemented in consultation with the subject teacher, special education teachers, parents/guardians, the student and relevant professionals, as appropriate.
- The review of Support Plans takes place on a regular basis and allows subsequent plans to be tailored to the individual needs of students in line with their developmental level. This may result in a decision to discontinue support, to continue the same level of support, or move to a higher or lower level of support.
- A Student Support File which includes Support Plan and Support Review Record is maintained for students identified as having special educational needs, as appropriate.
- In addition to monitoring outcomes at the individual level, reviews of outcomes at group, class and whole-school level are also conducted to inform subsequent planning at group and individual levels.

The implementation of the above tracking and recording system ensures that the progress of all students in meeting their identified targets is monitored at the Support for All, School Support (for Some) and School Support Plus (for a Few) levels of the continuum of support.

To support students with special educational needs effectively in the school and to ensure consistency of approach, all teachers (including subject teachers, special education teachers and the guidance counsellor) have access to relevant information from student support plans, in accordance with data protection legislation. This helps teachers to differentiate their subject teaching to meet the needs of their students, and to set specific targets related to their subject areas.

10. Timetabling

The effective use of resources is dependent upon effective timetabling practices that ensure continuity and avoid undue fragmentation of provision where possible. In matters pertaining to the timetabling of additional special education teaching supports, the over-riding principle is that resources are deployed to address identified needs of students. Importantly, those with the highest level of need should have access to the greatest level of support. Specifically:

- A core team of teachers should be allocated timetables dedicated to special education duties. This should be maintained in order to provide greater stability and continuity of support (avoiding a student having several different teachers).
- A flexible approach to timetabling should be adopted to ensure that extra capacity is available to address changing needs during the year. Accordingly, some members of the special education team may be allocated flexible timetables with inbuilt capacity to respond to additional needs.

- The overall school timetable should be designed carefully to make appropriate provision for students with special educational needs.
- Members of the special education support team should be consulted when the timetable is being developed.

11. Roles and responsibilities of school personnel

11.1 Board of Management

The Board of management has the responsibility for overseeing the development, implementation and review of school policies and services in relation to the inclusion of students with special educational needs.

11.2 The Principal

“Under current legislation the principal of the school has overall responsibility for ensuring that the special educational needs of students are met. As a consequence, the principal has the general responsibility for establishing and promoting whole-school policies and procedures that are supportive of the learning of all students, including those with special educational needs” (DES, 2007a, p. 67).

More specifically the role of the school principal includes the following:

- Assume overall responsibility for the development and implementation of the school’s policies and procedures to the inclusion of students with special educational needs.
- Oversee a whole-school approach to assessment and screening to identify needs and to guide the allocation of appropriate supports.
- Ensure effective engagement with feeder primary schools to support the transition of students with special educational needs.
- In collaboration with the in-school management team, discharge a key function in the deployment of staff, allocation of resources, organisation of students and timetabling.
- Ensure the additional Special Educational Teaching Supports allocated to John Scottus are used in their entirety to support students identified as having special educational needs, learning support needs, and additional literacy such as English Additional Language Support.
- Liaise with the Board of Management, Staff and Parents (Guardians) to develop a whole school plan for Learning Support and Special Educational Needs.
- Ensure that systems are in place for effective sharing of relevant information on students’ needs with all subject teachers.
- Facilitate the continuing professional development of all teachers in relation to the education of students with special educational needs and ensure that all school staff (subject teachers and special education teachers, guidance counsellors, special needs assistants) are clear regarding their roles and responsibilities in this area.
- Ensure that whole-school procedures are established to facilitate the effective involvement of parents, students and external professionals/agencies.
- Giving careful consideration to the formation of a special education needs team whose members have expertise and interest in special education so that provision can be coordinated efficiently and flexibly to meet a range of needs.

Subject to his/her overall statutory responsibilities, the principal may delegate the performance of specific responsibilities to other staff members, including members of the special education needs team.

11.3 Subject teachers

Research has consistently shown that the quality of teaching is the most critical factor in enhancing students' learning and educational experiences. In connection,

1. The subject teacher is responsible for educating all students in his/her class, including any student identified as having special educational needs.
2. Each subject teacher is **primarily** responsible for the progress and care of all students in his/her classroom, including students identified as having special educational needs.
3. It is the responsibility of the subject teacher to ensure that each student in his/her class is taught in a stimulating and supportive classroom environment where all students are respected and valued.
4. The subject teacher in consultation with the relevant special education teacher(s) will consider ways in which the curriculum will be differentiated and/or otherwise adapted to suit the needs of individual students. This may involve identifying the most appropriate teaching strategies and programmes to meet the students' needs.

11.4 Special Education needs team

A core team of teachers with responsibility for special educational needs meets once a week. It includes the principal and/or deputy principal, guidance counsellor, special education coordinator and special education teachers, as appropriate. Members of this team should have the necessary experience and ongoing access to professional development to support the diverse needs of students. The role of the Special Education needs team is to:

- Help ensure that those students with the greatest level of special educational need have access to support from teachers with the necessary experience and expertise.
- Develop, implement and monitor a whole-school approach to the education of students with special educational needs. This involves developing whole-school procedures for the selection of students for supplementary teaching, assisting in the implementation of whole-school strategies to enhance teaching and learning, and providing guidance to colleagues on the implementation of students' support plans.
- Work closely with subject teachers, parents and with other support structures within the school, such as the student support team and guidance counsellor.
- Provide valuable support to subject teachers to meet student needs within their classroom and subject areas.
- Work closely with subject teachers to provide additional teaching support for students identified as having special educational needs, as appropriate. All additional teaching support is provided to build on and complement the support planned and delivered by the subject teacher.
- Be familiar with a wide range of teaching approaches, methodologies and resources to cater for particular learning preferences and to meet a variety of needs. Teaching approaches could include a combination of within class teaching support, early intervention, small group and/or individual support.
- Plan their interventions carefully to address students' priority learning needs and to achieve the targets identified in the relevant Student Support Plan, in consultation with subject teachers.
- Routinely assess the outcomes for students, record them and use them to review progress. These outcomes should also be used to inform the targets for the next phase of intervention.

11.5 The Special Education Coordinator

The Special Education is tasked with planning and co-ordination activities required to ensure the most effective and optimal use of the special educational needs hours provided to schools, for students. In connection the school has a Special Education coordinator who, subject to the direction of the principal, assumes responsibility for co-ordinating overall provision for special educational needs within the school. The role of this Special Education coordinator is to:

- Co-ordinate data gathering, screening and testing relating to the special educational needs of students.
- Plan for the transition of students identified as having special educational needs to and from post primary school.
- Provide the principal, in May, with a list of requirements to have accommodated in the following year's school timetable to meet the needs of students identified as having special educational needs, as appropriate.
- Take a lead role in making arrangements for planning, implementation and review of student support plans.
- Support the communication of information regarding students' needs to subject teachers and class teachers.
- Source resources and assistive technology for students.
- Organise reasonable accommodations for certificate examinations.
- Liaise with other agencies, NEPS and allied health professionals.
- Liaise with parents and students.
- Liaise with the Principal to present to the board of management and teaching staff on matters pertaining to Special Education, as appropriate.
- Advise students on further education options including the CAO and the Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) supplementary admissions scheme for school leavers with disabilities which offers some places on a reduced points basis

11.6 The Guidance Counsellor

The guidance counsellor should be a member of the Special Education needs team to help in promoting the inclusion of students identified as having special educational needs.

11.7 Student Support Team

The Student Support Team serves an important preventative and early-intervention function, particularly in relation to addressing the needs of students with social, emotional, behavioural and well-being needs. The Student Support team coordinator should liaise with the Learning Support coordinator to ensure appropriate interventions are put in place to meet the special educational needs of students, as appropriate.

11.8 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)

The Special Needs Assistant is employed to assist pupils in an academic context within the classroom and in the area of social education outside the classroom. SNA duties are assigned by the Principal and are the following:

- Preparation and tidying up of classroom
- Assisting on out-of-school visits, walks, examinations and similar activities
- Helping special needs pupils with writing, typing or computers or use of other equipment

- Assistance with clothing, feeding, toileting, and being mindful of health and safety of students
- Accompanying individuals or small groups who have been withdrawn temporarily from the classroom
- General assistance to class teachers
- Participation with school development planning
- Communicate with parents of special needs pupils in both formal meetings and informally through regular emails and phone calls.
- Special Needs Assistants may be assigned other work when special needs pupils are absent

11.8 Parental/guardian engagement

Parents/guardians are central to developing and monitoring Student Support Plans. Parents help to set targets for managing homework, study, organisation, communication, social skills and behaviour.

Good parental/guardian engagement is a critical factor in enhancing outcomes for students with special educational needs. Accordingly, parents/guardians are consulted in relation to their children's needs and strengths and on the supports and strategies being developed to support their children and are also involved in regular reviews of progress.

In addition to consultation around the individual needs of their child, parents/guardians also receive information on the nature and type of the special educational needs provision available at the school. They are also consulted in the development and review of policies relating to the education of children with special educational needs as part of the school's policy for the cyclical review of all school policies. Parent/guardians are expected to help set targets for managing homework, study, organisation, communication, social skills and communication.

11.9 Student engagement

Good engagement and participation in their own education has many associated benefits for students. This is particularly important for students with special educational needs and can help enhance their academic and social and emotional outcomes. Accordingly, the school listens to and builds on students' interests, aspirations and strengths when developing educational interventions. This involves actively including students in a shared assessment for learning process, setting shared learning objectives, and jointly reviewing progress.

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