



# **Finn Valley College**

## **Special Education Needs Policy**

### **RATIONALE**

Finn Valley College recognises the importance of providing learning for all students. Students with special educational needs require that these needs be addressed to provide equality of opportunity for each student in our care in order that he/she fulfils his/her potential. The school's Special Educational Needs (SEN) Department seeks to deliver this aim through planning and cooperation with all school staff and with the relevant external professionals and agencies. The Special Needs Programme in Finn Valley College seeks to accommodate each student in fulfilling his potential whilst simultaneously avoiding unnecessary alienation of the Special Educational Needs student from his/her peers.

### **STATEMENT OF INTENT**

Finn Valley College will make every reasonable attempt to adapt its learning programmes and environment to allow students with Special Educational needs to fully access and actively engage in the physical, social and intellectual environment of our school. Such access will not to be the detriment of the individual.

Donegal ETB, the Board of Management, Principal, Special Needs Department and the school personnel are responsible for the implementation and delivery of this policy under the advice and direction of the National Council for Special Council, the S.E.N.O in as much as allocated resources will permit.

### **AIMS OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS DEPARTMENT**

To provide opportunities for all SEN students to:

1. Grow in confidence and self-esteem.
2. Reach their full potential academically, socially and personally through the provision of an appropriate broad and balanced curriculum.

3. Access as much of the curriculum as possible relative to the individual needs of the students.
4. Enable each student to function as independently as possible in society through the provision of the educational supports that are needed to realise that potential.
5. View learning as enjoyable and accessible.
6. Provide education for each student in a safe, caring and stimulating environment.
7. Build on the strengths and celebrate the achievements of each student.
8. Be respectful of themselves and others.
9. Be an active participant in school life.
10. Develop as responsible individuals.
11. Be prepared for 'real life'.
12. Enable the student to continue learning in adult life.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT**

- To identify students who may require additional teaching support
- To determine the most effective instructional and learning approaches for students.
- To provide on-going evaluation of teaching and learning plans and their outcomes and to report to parents, colleagues and other agencies as appropriate.
- To foster and support inclusion in the mainstream classroom.
- To encourage the continuous professional development of teachers in the provision of, the understanding, and, delivery of lessons that enhance the learning of the SEN student.
- To suggest referrals to other agencies where appropriate.
- To meet where appropriate with parents and other professionals in planning, delivering and evaluating any programme of work designed for the SEN student.
- To maintain records of the SEN of each student and to facilitate access to this information by relevant colleagues and other agencies as determined appropriate.
- To coordinate and support the work of the SNA on a daily basis to ensure the needs of the student with SEN is being met.

## **STUDENTS SERVED BY THE SEN DEPT**

A Special Educational Need is defined in the Education for persons with Special Educational Needs Act as:

*A restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of any enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition. (Government of Ireland, 2004b, Section 1).*

## Disability Codes

No	Category of Special Educational Need	Incidence
1	Physical Disability	Low
2	Hearing Impairment	Low
3	Visual Impairment	Low
4	Emotional Disturbance	Low
5	Severe Emotional Disturbance	Low
6	Borderline Mild General Learning Disability	High
7	Mild General Learning Disability	High
8	Moderate General Learning Disability	Low
9	Severe/Profound General Learning Disability	Low
10	Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders	Low
11	Specific Learning Disability	High
12	Assessed Syndrome	Low
13	Specific Speech and Language Disorder	Low
14	Multiple Disabilities	Low

(NCSE, Appendix 6; disability codes)

**OTHER:** Students performing below the tenth percentile in Literacy and/or Numeracy.

## **Enrolment of children with Special Educational Needs**

Finn Valley College welcomes all students for whom an appropriate education can be provided. The Board of Management may decide on an annual basis the number of students for whom the school can provide an appropriate education with regard to facilities, personnel, plant and resources available. To meet the student's needs and to ensure the student has all the additional resources available to promote maximum inclusion in the mainstream school, parents may be requested to furnish relevant reports from Primary school, Psychological reports and/or other medical documentation as deemed appropriate. This will allow the school to make advance preparation for the admission of a student and to seek resources from the NCSE. If a student has no history of psychological or medical intervention i.e. if an assessment has not been carried out, written consent from parents to apply for such an assessment may be required.

The NCSE has the authority to designate an appropriate school for a student with SEN and reserves the right to direct the school to enrol such a student; if the NCSE undertakes such a decision it will have due regard to the needs of the student, the wishes of the parents and the ability of the school to meet the needs of the student. (EPSEN, 2004. Section 10, subsections 1 and 2).

The decision of the NCSE can be appealed by the Board of Management within four weeks of being informed of the decision of the NCSE. (Section 10, subsection 3). The BOM must then prove that the school has inadequate resources to meet the needs of the student concerned. The BOM will undertake this action where circumstances make it unduly difficult for a student to adequately avail of the educational services of the school. The decision may then be reversed or upheld. (Section 10, subsection 5).

The ASD classrooms cater for twelve students. Applications for places will be considered by the Board of Management and Principal in collaboration with the ASD Specialist team. The team will consider whether the student with a diagnosis of ASD fits into an existing vacancy and will give due regard to the students already in the classroom in determining the suitability of the Special Classroom for that student. All admissions to the ASD Special Classes are subject to a four month assessment period following which an initial review is held.

## **TRANSFER OF DOCUMENTATION/INFORMATION**

Finn Valley College makes every effort to adhere to the recommendations published by the NCCA in *'Moving Up: The Experiences of First Year Students in Post Primary Education'*.

1. Pre-entry the school makes contact with the feeder primary school to provide Finn Valley College with information about the school and each 6<sup>th</sup> class student receives a school prospectus. The Principal personally visits each Feeder School.
2. An Open Day is held for 6<sup>th</sup> class students wherein they sample the curriculum and whole-school activities offered in the school. Students are familiarised with the school building and will learn what is expected of them when they join the school. Opportunities for reading and understanding timetables etc. are provided. Students also meet their year group peers. This programme serves to alleviate the anxiety often experienced in the transition process when the academic year commences.
3. An Open Night is held for the parents of potential first years where parents can view the school, meet the staff and clarify questions with the latter. Relevant school policy, the structure of the Subject Departments and the ethos of the school is presented to parents.
4. After formal enrolment of a student each feeder school will be contacted either by visit or phone call to determine the educational needs of each student. The primary school will be requested to forward documentation such as the completed Post Primary Transfer document designed by NEPS, Psychological Assessment Reports and any other Para-medical documentation (e.g. OT, Individual Education Plans, results of screening/standardised testing and copies of Irish Exemptions where such documents exist). A record of the Resource hours received by each SEN student and the period over which the latter was operational will be requested. A note of the Learning Support Model found to be most appropriate in meeting the needs of the student will also be made.
5. Where a Primary School has engaged in the transfer of an Education Passport (as set out by the NCCA), the school will retain the 6<sup>th</sup> Class Report, Standardised test results, the "My Profile" and "My Child's Profile" documentation. In addition, the Special Education Needs summary form and so forth will be retained by the school's LSCO on a confidential basis.
6. All documentation is held securely in the Learning Support Coordinator's Office.

## **TRANSITION FROM PRIMARY**

In addition to the steps outlined above, the transition process is eased for students by the implementation and adherence to the following steps:

1. Use of a pastoral care system wherein each group has a class teacher and each year has a form master/year head. The class teacher meets the student for ten minutes each morning before class and any issues a student is having in school can be discussed during this time. The class teacher acts as a link person and an advocate on behalf of the student and the student can approach or arrange to meet the class teacher to discuss any difficulties he/she may be experiencing. The function of the year head is an extension of the responsibility of the class teacher with an added discipline function.
2. Careful monitoring of student attendance and progress during the first eight weeks of school.
3. Students largely remain with their Primary school group for the first six weeks. During this transition period they have the opportunity to become familiar with school life in the supportive environment of their established school group.
4. During the transition programme, students are offered a wide range of subjects rather than making a subject choice for Junior Certificate with little experience of the subject area.
5. An extensive number of measures are utilised to determine the most appropriate class grouping for each student. First year students are assessed on their performance in the first two months of school.
6. Some students may have needs that warrant a more individualised transition programme which may begin earlier than that outlined above. The transition and integration arrangements for such students are needs led. This is particularly relevant to those children diagnosed ASD.
7. After the six week transition period each parent receives a detailed formal report on their child which provides feedback on areas such as academic progress, attendance, punctuality, behaviour, effort and Literacy and Numeracy abilities in terms of Percentile Rank. A Parent-Teacher Meeting is arranged for after the first mid-term break so that parents and teachers can discuss the students' progression.

## **THE SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS TEAM**

While Finn Valley College takes a holistic whole-school approach to special educational needs in which all staff play a role, the management of SEN provision in the school is vested in a core team. The core of the SEN Team comprises the Principal, two formally trained Learning Support Teachers, two specialist ASD Teachers, twelve Special Needs Assistants and a small group of subject teachers. The group work closely with the Career Guidance Teachers and those involved in pastoral roles including the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) teacher and a dedicated Student Support Team for students requiring more intensive interventions. Team meetings occur as necessary throughout the year, at scheduled student planning and review meetings and at staff development days. Other agencies are regularly consulted and met with as necessary including; NEPS, the visiting teacher service, the NCSE and SENO, the NEWB, Clinical Psychology, Paediatric Psychiatry, Key worker for children with physical and sensory disabilities, the HSE and training and occupational support services.

The physical Special Educational Needs department comprises one Learning Support Coordinator's Office, two Learning Support classrooms, two special classrooms and a library stocked with high interest-low readability books.

## **PARENTS**

Article 42.1 of Bunreacht na hÉireann recognises the family as the primary educator of the child and identifies the right of parents to provide for the religious, moral, intellectual and social education of their children. The latter role is affirmed by two other pieces of legislation, namely; The Education Act (1998) and the EPSEN (2004). Finn Valley College encourages maximum parental involvement and to establish a partnership on the educating of each student in the following ways:

1. Parents are provided with the opportunity to visit the school and obtain information regarding the school to facilitate them in the selection of a second-level school for their child.
2. An open evening is held annually for parents of first years so that any issues/concerns can be clarified and addressed by school management and the first year Year Head and Class Teacher. Links between the home and the school are encouraged through this meeting between parents and key staff members.
3. An information booklet/school prospectus is provided to all students in sixth class from the feeder schools in the catchment area.
4. A clear daily communication system between home and school exists via the student diary. Any other communication system between the school and the parents of a student with SEN is at the discretion of the LSCO the ASDCO, the Principal and the parents of that student but must be proportionate to the care needs and must relate to any individual SEN student's learning performance on a given day.
5. The parents of students on the School Support Plus intervention stage and the relevant SEN teachers will meet in October of the academic year to plan for the year ahead.

Outside professionals and key staff members involved in the case may be invited to attend the meeting by the LSCO, ASDCO or Principal as necessary. This meeting will not normally exceed one hour for each student and may only be extended if school resources and organisational considerations permit.

6. A second meeting will be held in April/May of the academic year to review the targets of their school-support plus plan and to begin planning for the next academic year. This meeting will take a similar format to the review meeting outlined above. The school operates a one review meeting per year [policy as per the terms of the EPSEN Act 2004 (Section 2), to ensure each student with SEN in the school is given equal and fair treatment in ensuring they reach their potential. If parents request a review of their child's education plan on the conviction that their child is failing to attain the goals set out in the plan and a review was not executed in the period of the previous six months, the Principal may assent to the arrangement of such a meeting at the request of the parent(s).
7. All parents are provided with regular formal reports on their child's general progress in the mainstream classes and on their learning development in Learning Support class where applicable. Parents can also track the Literacy and Numeracy development of their child through the annual provision of standardised test results.
8. Parents have the opportunity to meet with all teachers at arranged parent-teacher meetings each year.
9. Additional meetings may be arranged as necessary or at the request of parents. These meetings will be accommodated where the LSCO/ASDCO/Principal deems them reasonable and appropriate.

## **ACCESS TO RECORDS**

1. All SEN students who receive additional special education support have a record of progress included within their mainstream report book. This is completed by the relevant Learning Support teacher and a short overview is also recorded by the Learning Support Coordinator before the report is sent home. All reports on the progress of students with SEN are housed in the photocopy room of the staff room to facilitate ease of access to all teachers.
2. The LSCO manages the file of each student with SEN. The student's official file is comprised of all reports by external agencies as well as the student's school support plus plan if relevant. Any record of meetings on that student is contained in the file together with any teacher surveys executed on the difficulties/progress of that student. The ASD Coordinator is responsible for the holding of detailed records of the students with ASD who are linked to the special classroom. These records are stored securely in the Special classroom.
3. At the beginning of the each academic year a brief overview of the nature of each SEN student and any change in the SEN of other students is verbally presented to the teaching staff and SNA's at the first staff meeting of the new academic year. The SNA's will be given access to all relevant files on the First Year cohort and will be familiar with



the needs of each new SEN student before the rest of the school population commence the new academic year.

4. The LSCO and the ASD Coordinator facilitate the access to all information relevant to the teaching or supervision of a student with SEN inclusive of psychological reports and other confidential documents. Where it is deemed beneficial to the teaching and learning of the student concerned, a teacher or SNA can view the student file in the Learning Support Office/ASD classroom and take discrete notes from the file as necessary. The student's initials will be used for this purpose rather than the full name. Confidential information cannot be removed from the Learning Support Office/ASD classroom or duplicated for any reason without the express permission of the Learning Support Coordinator/ASD Coordinator/Principal.
5. From time to time, staff may be informed of an emergent need of a student and this is communicated via a memo from the LSCO/ASDCO to the relevant staff members. A copy of relevant memos is maintained on that students' record.

### **SEN STRATEGY**

'The withdrawal of students from mainstream class activities for one-to-one or small group teaching should be balanced against their real needs to participate in educational experiences with their peers'. (EPSEN 2004).

Finn Valley College recognises the need to maximise the participation of all students in mainstream classes. The school seeks first and foremost to support the learning of the SEN student without removing him from his class group. The intention is to maximise inclusion whilst catering for a diversity of learning needs. The following approaches facilitate the school in doing this:

- Students are carefully placed in the most appropriate class grouping. Careful consideration is given to matching the needs of each student with the programmes offered. When determining the class that would prove of most benefit to the advancement of the learning of any student the provision of suitable curricular options (e.g. JCSP) and the arrangements for the provision of additional teaching support is considered. The latter is provided through in-class support, cooperative teaching, smaller class group, reduction in subject numbers and placing of a special emphasis on the development of Literacy and Numeracy.
- In order to provide the most suitable programme and experience for the needs of the students; a wide range of measures are utilised to determine a students' learning needs e.g. measures undertaken during six week induction programme for first years as outlined earlier; screening occurs for all first years (special arrangements may be made for children with exceptional needs); information is obtained from primary schools (under section 28 of the Education Welfare Act ,2000; and, information pertinent to the welfare of children can be shared amongst agencies such as school to school).

## **A CONTINUUM OF SUPPORT**

FVC has adopted the three stage approach to supporting the learning of all students through the operation of a graduated and proportionate investigative model that is made up of three separate school-based steps. The approach is underpinned by the following ideologies:

1. Effective learning should be provided for all students.
2. The adopted approach must be one of preventative support provided at an appropriate level rather than reparation.
3. It should function within a consultative and concerted teamwork and resolution-orientated agenda.
4. Interventions for those deemed as having additional needs should be appropriate in terms of time and value.

## **THE MODEL**

- School Support for All
  - School Support for Some
  - School Support for Few
1. At the Support for All stage students are provided with a suitable curriculum and their progress is continually considered and monitored. Measures of progress e.g. in-class in-house examinations, AFL, teacher observation, screening tests, teacher surveys etc. are used to inform the effective teaching of all students within the context of the mainstream class. In this way, the emerging needs of students are identified. A formal pastoral care system (Class Teachers and Year Heads) is used to provide behavioural support. During this stage, students who may require further observation or even intervention may be identified. Some students will be placed at the school support stage upon entry e.g. when their needs are known and documented and resources may have been granted by the NCSE.
  2. The second stage of the model is to support students who are failing to make adequate progress despite the use of the whole-school strategies employed. These students may require additional support. The planning and intervention process may include:
    - Consultation with subject teachers to determine the nature and extent of any obstacles to learning for that student.
    - Parent interview
    - Information/advice/support from medical/Para-medical specialists.
    - Meeting between the student and key members of the SEN team to determine difficulties being experienced by that student.

- Planning, in association with key members of the teaching team an intervention plan.
- Setting of subject goals for that student.
- Accommodations to support learning and/or social interaction as appropriate. The latter will be tailored to suit the student and his needs.
- Participation in Learning Support.
- Reduced subject load.
- Social skills group activity.
- RACE.

The interventions may be planned to meet the collective needs of a group or the individual needs of a student.

3. The third stage of the model caters for those students whose needs cannot be fulfilled by the interventions outlined above. This cohort of SEN students nationally, is representative of approximately 2-5% of the school population but is closer to 7% in our school at the moment. These are the students who experience significant difficulties and who may require concentrated, individualised interventions. The latter may take the form of any combination of the following measures:

- The development and implementation of a School Support for Few Plan is in keeping with the 2006, NCSE Guidelines on the Individual Education Planning Process. This plan will include reference to the following as per EPSEN, 2004; the nature and degree of a student's skills, abilities and talents, the nature and degree of their SEN and the impact of the latter on their education development, the student's present level of educational achievement, the Special Education and Support Services to be provided and arrangements for monitoring and evaluation. (or IEP when all relevant sections of the EPSEN Act become mandatory). An individual support plan may include
  - Additional Professional Input e.g. Psychological assessment by NEPS
  - Specialist interventions e.g. visiting teacher service.
  - Special transport arrangements
  - Exemption from the study of Irish
  - Assistive Technology grants
  - Designated resource teaching hours and/or Special Needs Assistant.
  - Special transfer programmes; primary-post-primary and from post-primary to third level education, training courses or employment.

## **MONITORING / REVIEW OF STUDENT PROGRESS**

The SEN/ASD Coordinator organises the review meeting. Parents and – where deemed appropriate or necessary – outside professionals attend the meeting. The review will focus on the progress of a student towards the achievement of the set targets. This meeting will inform future action. The information presented at this meeting will determine whether a student will remain under the intensive “Support for Few” level or return to the whole school support structures to have their needs met.

## **SCHOOL ASSESSMENT**

A balanced assessment system is used in the gathering of information. This process allows teachers to gauge student achievement and to inform the instruction in the student support plan.

### *SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT*

This type of assessment measures the progress of students after a period of time.

Unless a student is clearly unable to participate in the mainstream classroom tests and/or in-house examinations; all students participate in this type of summative assessment. Summative assessment is held formally three times per year for first years and twice for the rest of the student population - October (First Years only), December and May. The assessment includes the measuring of Literacy and Numeracy development for all students during December annually. A three-tiered model is employed to maximise the inclusion of all students in the in-house examinations.

#### **1. THE MAINSTREAM EXAMINATION HALL**

Where it is deemed an SEN student can cope with the examinations independently without the assistance of an SNA/reduced student: teacher ratio s/he will remain in the main examination centre with the rest of the student population. Where resources allow, a designated SNA will remain on standby to deal with any situation which may arise in relation to the SEN student.

#### **2. THE SEN EXAM HALL**

In the case of the SEN of a student warranting the granting of a Reasonable Accommodation in the exams, a room is made available where this student will complete his/her

examinations with a small group of students with similar needs that necessitates additional supports and resources. The students prioritised for this examination centre are determined by the Learning Support Coordinator and the ASD Coordinator. The students who avail of this room are most often those who will be in receipt of RACE and those who have a designated SNA. A teacher will supervise the exam centre. Each SNA will assist a student or a small grouping of students during the examination period. (With the exception of providing any assistance in the reading involved in the standardised Literacy Test or calculations involved in the standardised Numeracy Test).

### 3. THE ASD CLASSROOM

Where neither of the above arrangements are appropriate in meeting the needs of a student and in the case where a student has an ASD diagnosis, arrangements will be made for the student to complete assessment in the ASD classroom or to continue his/her school support plan as normal with the assistance of the SNA and the direction of the ASD specialist teacher. The ASD classroom will continue to be operational during the examination period. This will be reflected in the examination timetable.

### FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

This type of assessment is more continuous and is largely used to enhance the learning of students during the teaching and learning process. The staff has committed to use the AFL approach and are encouraged to do so in several ways including encouraging students to assess their own learning and that of their peers. The provision by teachers of descriptive feedback is a key instructional instrument in progressing student learning. Students will be provided with the detail which will allow them to understand what they have done well and where improvements are necessary. Formative assessment informs instruction and can be as simple as the teacher observation of students on task. The SEN Department regularly surveys the mainstream teaching staff regarding the progress of an SEN student. NEPS may also be involved in both summative and formative assessment of a student where necessary and permitted by the parent. The latter information informs future school support planning.

### PURPOSES OF ASSESSMENT

- a. To monitor progress
- b. To establish a baseline to a student's attainment.
- c. To guide the formulation of teaching and learning.
- d. To apply for additional teaching support from the NCSE.
- e. To apply for additional supports and other services.
- f. To inform consultations with NEPS / Donegal ETB Psychologists.
- g. To identify any student who should be referred to any outside agency for assessment and/or intervention after consultation with the student's parent(s).

## LEGISLATIVE, REGULATORY AND POLICY CONTEXT

This policy has been prepared in the context of the following legislation, regulations, guidance and policies:

- Education Act, 1998
- Education (Welfare) Act, 2000
- Education and Training Boards Act, 2013
- Education for Persons with Special Education Needs Act (EPSEN), 2004
- Education for Persons with Disabilities Act, 2004
- Equal Status Act, 2000
- Child Care Act, 1991
- Data Protection Acts, 1988 & 2003
- Freedom of Information Act, 1997
- DES Circular Letter 56/11
- Guidelines on the Individual Education Plan Process (NCSE)
- Inclusive Education Framework – A guide for Schools on the Inclusion of Pupils with Special Educational Needs (NCSE)
- Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs: Post-Primary Guidelines (Inspectorate publication)
- An Evaluation of Educational Provision for Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (Inspectorate)
- Facing the Challenge, Exploring the Opportunities – Introducing an Integrated Provision for Students with Autism (City of Cork VEC)
- Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools (NEPS)
- Student Support Teams in Post-Primary Schools (NEPS)
- A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools (NEPS)
- Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities (NCCA)
- Moving Up: The Experiences of First Year Students in Post-Primary Education (NCCA)
- Finn Valley College Enrolment and Admissions Policy
- Finn Valley College Pastoral Care Policy
- Finn Valley College Student Support Team protocols
- Finn Valley College Homework Policy
- Finn Valley College RACE Policy
- Finn Valley College SNA Policy
- Finn Valley Guidance Plan
- In addition the policy is informed by a range of resources available on the NCSE, PDST, NBSS and NCCA websites.

## **POLICY REVIEW**

This policy will be review on a consultative basis with the relevant stakeholders. It will be reviewed annually. The date for the next review of the policy is October 2015.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Chairperson

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Secretary