

# PRIMROSE HILL NATIONAL SCHOOL

## LEARNING SUPPORT POLICY

### **Introduction**

*“A central task of the primary school is to provide pupils with levels of literacy that will be adequate for further education and for their development as individuals who are able to function effectively in society.”* (National Education Convention 1994).

Almost every year the class teacher identifies a small group of children who for one reason or another do not perform as well as the majority of their classmates in one or all of the areas of oral language, reading, spelling, writing, comprehension, computation, concepts and problem solving. Problems with attainment in Reading and Maths may arise from, and almost certainly lead to, low self-esteem culminating, at the senior classes, in a sense of failure and loss of motivation. A pattern may then set in which is difficult to break and which results in the child leaving the formal education system ill-prepared to meet the challenges of society or their own dreams/ambitions.

*“Each school has the responsibility for assisting, to the best of its ability, all of its pupils to realise their education potential.”* (Special Education Review Committee 1993).

Since the school Self Evaluation in Maths in 2013 the school have also identified the need to provide additional resources in terms of Learning Support for those children who achieve very high scores in their standard tests. As part of the SSE process this plan of action is to be reviewed in 2015.

### **Aims of Learning Support**

The aim of learning-support is to optimise the teaching and learning process so as to enable pupils with learning difficulties to achieve adequate levels of proficiency in literacy and numeracy before leaving primary school.

More specifically the aims of learning support are;

- To enable these pupils to participate in the full curriculum for their class level
- To develop positive self-esteem and positive attitudes about school and learning in these pupils
- To enable these pupils to monitor their own learning and become independent learners
- To provide supplementary teaching and additional support and resources for these pupils in English and Maths
- To involve parents in supporting their children’s learning through effective parent-support programmes
- To promote collaboration among teachers in the implementation of whole-school policies on learning support for these pupils
- To establish early intervention programmes and other programmes designed to enhance learning and to prevent /reduce difficulties in learning or provide more challenging learning opportunities.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

The adoption of a collaborative approach by all those who work with children experiencing low or high achievement / difficulties or strengths leads to effective learning support and positive outcomes

for the children. Each of the following has specific, different but complementary roles and responsibilities. (See the appendix for a fuller description)

The **principal** has overall responsibility for the school's learning support programme and for the operation of services for children with special educational needs. An important part of the principal's role is to provide support for, and ensure the involvement of, all the partners in the planning and direction of the learning programme for children in receipt of supplementary teaching i.e. the teaching provided by the learning-support teacher to pupils in the reading room or in class support in the pupil's own classroom.

The **class teacher** has primary responsibility for the progress of all the children in her/his class. A particular responsibility is to create a classroom environment in which learning difficulties can be at best prevented or at least alleviated, and where the need arises, to provide differentiated material. Where supplementary teaching cannot be provided for a pupil or is being phased out or discontinued the class teacher will need to develop and implement a support programme that meets the pupil's changing needs - in consultation with the learning-support teacher. Meeting and communicating with parents about their children's work and progress and what the parents can do to support this is another important role.

The main focus of the **learning-support teacher's** work is the provision of supplementary teaching to pupils. Among other activities s/he will contribute to policy development in the area of learning support, assess each pupil's learning strengths and needs and write up a plan and implement a programme for the pupil in consultation with the class teacher, keep records, communicate with the class teacher about individual pupil's progress, concentrate on early intervention (Jnr. Inf. to 2<sup>nd</sup> class), coordinate the provision of learning support services, provide opportunities for formal meetings with parents at least twice during the year or as the need arises and consult with the school staff as a group about the development of the learning support service.

The **parent's** role is in communicating and meeting with their child's teachers about the child's difficulties and achievements and supporting work done in school particularly by working with their child at home using strategies and methods discussed with the teachers.

The **pupils** themselves have a role by taking responsibility for their own learning and being involved in the development, implementation and review of their own learning programmes.

### **Learning Support Strategies**

In order to prevent failure and remediate learning difficulties the Department of Education and Science recommends the implementation of whole school programmes in English and Maths. Specific strategies in this regard will be included in the school plans in these subjects.

Research evidence indicates that the implementation of an **intensive early intervention programme** in the junior classes is the most effective response to meeting the needs of children who experience low achievement and/or learning difficulties in Language and Numeracy. In this school the needs of these children will be given the greatest consideration when allocating time for supplementary teaching.

Where a class has been split due to numbers, if possible the learning supports will be used so that the split class will be put together for English and Maths. This class will be taught as one class by one teacher, thereby reducing the need for withdrawal for individual Learning Support.

## **The Learning-Support Process**

The earlier a child's difficulties are identified the sooner the school can help the child overcome, accommodate or compensate for those difficulties. Relevant information about the children will be sought from parents before or at the time their children begin school. During their first two years in the school children who have difficulties will come to the attention of the class teacher. The teacher along with her/his own systematic observations and recording of the child's learning behaviour and attainment may employ checklists, observation schedules and screening tests. A formal screening measure will be administered to the children in senior infants in late Spring - The Middle Infant Screening Test. The Belfield Infant Assessment Profile will be administered to Junior Infants in February. The sequence for screening, selection, assessment, planning and review is outlined below:

### **1. Preliminary Screening**

The class teacher or learning-support teacher administers and interprets formal or/and informal screening measures.

### **2. Selection for Diagnostic Assessment**

Consultations take place between the class teacher and the parents and between the class teacher and the learning-support teacher.

### **3. Diagnostic Assessment**

The learning-support teacher administers diagnostic tests and interprets the outcomes in consultation with the class teacher. They also discuss the most appropriate form of intervention (withdrawal from class for supplementary teaching: in-class supplementary teaching: appropriate modification of teaching approaches in the child's own class or a combination of some or all of the above).

### **4. Programme Implementation**

The learning-support teacher provides supplementary teaching based on the child's strengths and weaknesses for an agreed period of time after which it will be reviewed, monitoring the child's ongoing difficulties and achievements, recording these on the child's record and modifying the learning programme accordingly.

### **5. Programme Review at the end of the Instructional Term**

The teachers evaluate the learning programme and consult with the parents about the level of support now required by the pupil. This may lead to the discontinuation of supplementary teaching and the planning of appropriate support in the child's own class and at home. Supplementary teaching may be continued with a new learning programme in place.

Occasions may arise where the child appears not to be benefiting from the learning programme offered. At a meeting or after discussion with the principal the parents will be invited to obtain a psychological assessment of their child. The school may assist with this through the National Educational Psychologist Scheme (NEPS). Depending on the outcome of an assessment, options to be considered and discussed might include a revision of the child's learning programme or the procuring of the services of a resource teacher.

The learning-support teacher will keep a file in a locked cabinet in the reading room on each child with whom s/he is working or with whom s/he has worked. The file will usually comprise all tests administered to the child, her/his individual profile and learning programme, any reports from health or education professionals, relevant correspondence and some samples of the child's work. When sought they will be made available to particular staff, parents and the inspector. In keeping with school policy, old files will be retained until the pupil has reached the age of 25.

## **The Work of the Learning-Support Teacher**

The **general work** of the learning–support teacher will ordinarily include the following;

- the identification, prioritisation and selection of children for supplementary teaching in consultation with partners
- the formulation of a Learning Programme for each child or group of children with similar learning needs
- establishment of a time table; encouraging class teachers to ensure that the children do not miss the same subject, all or even most of the time and that they do not miss English or Maths or their favourite subjects
- the provision of supplementary teaching, through withdrawal, in the Learning-Support Room or, particularly with Infants, through a combination of withdrawal and in-class work: supplementary teaching will be geared towards the attainment of the targets outlined in the children’s’ learning programme.
- assigning appropriate homework to support work done in sessions
- ongoing planning, record-keeping and monitoring and assessment (formal and informal) of the children’s’ progress: reviewing the progress of each child at the end of an instructional term
- regularly meeting and communicating with the class teacher to discuss children’s’ progress
- procuring the necessary resources to assist towards the attainment of the targets in the learning programmes.
- organising and attending cluster meetings (i.e. principals and inspectors)
- formal bi-annual meetings with parents and other formal and informal meetings as the needs arise
- advising class teachers and parents about relevant resources, software and assistive technology where appropriate
- attendance at staff meetings for information, communication and consultation
- yard supervision

## **Monitoring and Review**

Together with the learning-support teacher and relevant others the principal will organise regular meetings to monitor the implementation of the policy. She will consult with class teachers and parents and will share the outcomes of the review with the teaching staff and the board of management in the school.

The principal will ensure that a comprehensive review of the policy will take place in three years and will take into account the views of the partners. The outcomes of such a review may lead to a revision of the policy and appropriate changes in specific practices.

Signed

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**Chairperson, Board of Management**

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**School Principal**

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