



Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School

Policy and Practices for students with Additional Educational Needs

INTRODUCTION

We welcome all students with additional educational needs to our school. Under the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, which was passed into law in July 2004, an additional educational need is defined as:

...a restriction in the capacity of the 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.

At Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School, all students with additional educational needs are provided with the most inclusive and supportive educational experience insofar as possible within the limits of resources awarded to us by the Department of Education and Skills.

We ask parent(s) and/or guardian(s) of students with any additional educational needs to contact school management, namely the Principal, at the earliest opportunity, in order to discuss a student's specific needs. We ask this because, if necessary, the Principal can apply for resources to cater for the student's needs from the Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO), who works for the National Council for Additional Education (NCSE).

RESPONSIBILITIES

It is our policy that all students with additional educational needs are the responsibility of all members of teaching and Special Needs Assistant (SNA) staff.

School management, the Principal and Deputy Principal, Year Heads and Class Tutors play an important role in the support and encouragement of students with additional educational needs.

The school Additional Educational Needs Coordinator (AENCO) and the Additional Educational Needs Department at the school play an additional role in supporting and teaching students with additional educational needs.

School management, the Additional Educational Needs Coordinator and the Additional Educational Needs Department regularly meet as we endeavour to ensure students' individual needs are being accommodated.

School SNA staff play a crucial role in supporting students who have been awarded access to this support by the SENO. SNAs are welcomed into classrooms by all members of teaching staff and their contributions to the educational experience of students with additional educational needs are valued by all members of school staff.

It is our policy that we ensure to involve both the student with additional educational needs and his or her parent(s) and/or guardian(s) in decisions which may affect the student's education and welfare within our school.

Further to this, it is our policy to always obtain parental/guardian consent to obtain documentation from previous schools and/or external agencies.

GATHERING INFORMATION AND ENTRANCE TEST PROCEDURES

In accordance with our Admissions Policy and Enrolment Procedures, we ask that every parent and/or guardian who wishes to obtain a place in Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School for their son/daughter completes an application form. There is a section on this application form where a parent and/or guardian can indicate whether or not their son/daughter has an educational psychology assessment. If any new student has an educational psychology assessment, it is our policy that a copy of that report must be submitted by either the parent and/or the primary school of that student.

Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School aims to ensure that at least one member of the Additional Educational Needs Department meets with the teachers and/or management staff of the primary school annually. The purpose of these meetings is to collect information which may help us to plan to cater for new students with additional educational need who are to be enrolled in our school the following academic year.

In the case of a new student joining our school from a different, non-feeder primary school or a new student transitioning into any year group from a different post-primary school, the Principal and/or the Additional Educational Needs Coordinator always makes contact with the school in question in order to ensure all necessary information is obtained.

In keeping with Data Protection Laws, any documentation related to students obtained by Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School is securely locked away and kept on school grounds at all times and treated with the strictest confidentiality.

All students joining First Year sit an Entrance Exam while still in Sixth Class in primary school insofar as possible*. One of these tests is a reading test, another is a basic spelling test, and one is a Mathematics test. All tests used are nationally recognised; the tests used are CAT (Cognitive Abilities Test), Cloze Reading Test (D. Young) and WRAT (Wide Range Achievement Test). Using these assessments means we are more informed when placing students in classes and we can ensure that the most appropriate class is chosen for each student.

** Should a student enrolling in the Special Class for students with a diagnosis of ASD be unable to sit an Entrance Exam, the AENCO will liaise with the student's class teacher in primary school, the student's parent/guardian and the AEN team in relation to any psychological assessment and reports that have been included in the application. The data compiled from this process in addition to any possible in-house testing will inform the student's Student Support Plan.*

CLASS GROUPINGS AND STRUCTURES FOR STUDENTS WITH ADDITIONAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

At Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School, we have a additional interest in providing our students with the greatest level of support possible within the limits of resources. Therefore, each year, we timetable a number of Learning Support and Resource classes to support our students with the most significant additional educational needs. Priority is generally given to students with basic literacy and numeracy difficulties and to students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Some of these Learning Support and Resource classes are used for individual tuition and some are composed of small groups of students. These classes may be drawn from either Junior Cycle or Senior Cycle classes.

The Additional Educational Needs Department analyse the needs of these students and follow specific, targeted, structured and systematic programmes. This is not an Individual Education Plan/Student Support Plan which would require considerable resources and time and structured meetings between staff, parent(s) and/or guardian(s) and the student. For students with significant difficulties and in receipt of the highest level of support on the Continuum of Support, Student Support Plans are put in place in consultation with staff, parent(s) and/or guardian(s) and the student. The Student Support Plan is then implemented across all classes to the best of each teacher's ability.

Each year, there is a cohort of teachers who are allocated Learning Support and Resource classes by school management. Predominantly, these classes are allocated to teachers who are in the Additional Educational Needs Department.

Our school promotes the social integration of all students, regardless of ability, and as a result of this all mixed ability classes will have some students with additional educational needs.

The timetabled Learning Support and Resource classes focus on Literacy/English and Numeracy/Mathematics however in additional circumstances where a student may need support in another subject, we try our best to facilitate this.

The students that will be offered Learning Support and Resource classes are decided by the Additional Educational Needs Department in consultation with school management, parent(s) and/or guardian(s) and primary schools or previous schools.

It is our policy to seek written permission from parent(s) and/or guardian(s) of students who are offered Learning Support and Resource classes for them to attend these classes.

In exceptional circumstances, our school may allow some students with significant difficulties to reduce the number of subjects they are studying. For example, if a student has a serious difficulty with English and has had an exemption from studying Irish in primary school/previous school, we may be able to offer extra classes in Learning Support and Resource in place of Irish.

Under the most recent revised circular on the Exemption from the Study of Irish, parent(s) and/or guardian(s) of students who have not previously had an exemption but who wish for their son/daughter to be granted an exemption from studying Irish must apply to the Principal in writing. The Principal will follow the steps set out in the circular and will give the response to the request in writing to the parent(s) and/or guardian(s) of the student and where an exemption is granted, the Principal will issue a Certificate of Exemption. In the case where a student is 18 years or over, a student can make an application himself/herself. It is important to note that an exemption will only be granted only in exceptional circumstances.

ASD CLASS

Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School has a class for students who are on the Autistic Spectrum. The class has a maximum of six students. Students enrolled in this class often integrate with mainstream classes as we try to promote the social inclusion of all students and all teaching staff are aware of which students are in the ASD class. The students enrolled in the ASD class who are in Junior Cycle undertake the Level 1, Level 2 and/or Level 3 Programmes, depending on their individual needs.

For information on enrolment to the ASD Special Class please refer to the Admission Policy 'ENROLMENT CRITERIA FOR SPECIAL CLASSES INCORPORATING THE DES AND HSE POLICIES' (Page 11)

SHARING INFORMATION WITH STAFF

At the beginning of the year all staff are made aware of new and existing students with additional educational needs. Information is shared at a staff meeting specifically on Teaching and Learning and Additional Educational Needs. This meeting is important as the Additional Educational Needs Team list the students who have significant additional educational needs, for example, dyslexia, hearing or visual impairments, Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and any other difficulty students may present with.

Under Data Protection laws, no written information is given to staff with identifying information about students and all information is shared on the basis that it is strictly confidential laws. Furthermore, any discussion about students with additional educational needs focuses on ways of helping students in difficulty and parents and/or guardians can be assured that any discussion will be carried out in a sensitive, caring and professional manner.

EXTERNAL AGENCIES AND SERVICES

Each year, we ask NEPS (the National Educational Psychology Service) to assess students who are in need of educational psychological assessments. Such students may have serious learning and/or emotional or behavioural difficulties. Priority is given to students who have never been assessed before. The severity of the difficulty is another factor in prioritising students for assessments. The principal and members of the Additional Educational Needs Team make applications for these assessments to the NEPS psychologist assigned to our school.

Occasionally, when appropriate, the school may request other outside agencies and services such as CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services), to assess students and/or to assist students with additional educational needs.

The school applies to the State Examinations Commission (SEC) every year for students who are entitled to Reasonable Accommodations for the Certificate Exams (RACE). It is the responsibility of the Additional Educational Needs Coordinator to make these RACE applications and to ensure the principal is aware and has signed the RACE forms.

The Principal and the Additional Educational Needs Department, in consultation with staff, often try to arrange in-service training on aspects of teaching students with additional educational needs.

JUNIOR CERTIFICATE/CYCLE SCHOOL PROGRAMME

All students in Junior Cycle are entered into the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP). This programme runs alongside the Junior Certificate/Junior Cycle Programme and is focused on Statements of Learning in each subject.

Students receive their JCSP certificates before they sit their state examinations.

A core team of teachers are timetabled to meet for one class per week to profile student progress and to discuss ways of helping students with additional educational needs if necessary. The Additional Educational Needs Coordinator is part of the JCSP core team.

LEVEL 1 & 2 LEARNING PROGRAMMES

Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School can offer Level 1 & 2 Learning Programmes (L1/2LPs) to students whose additional educational needs are such as to prevent them from accessing Level 3 Junior Cycle subjects and/or short courses. It is important to note that there are very specific criteria that need to be met for a student to be eligible to undertake these programmes. These criteria are set out by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

L1/2LPs can be undertaken by students in the ASD class or in mainstream classes. Teachers are supported by the A.E.N. team in teaching Level 1/2. Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School identifies an ASD/L1/2LP Coordinator as a need and priority of the school for the period 2020-2022. The ASD/L2LP Coordinator will work closely with senior management, the S.E.N. team and all teaching and SNA staff and carry out duties related to the ASD class and the L1/2LPs.

For information on enrolment in the L1/L2LP please refer to the Admission Policy 'Level 1 or Level 2 Learning Programme at Junior Cycle (Pages 9 & 10).

AWARDS AND ENCOURAGEMENTS

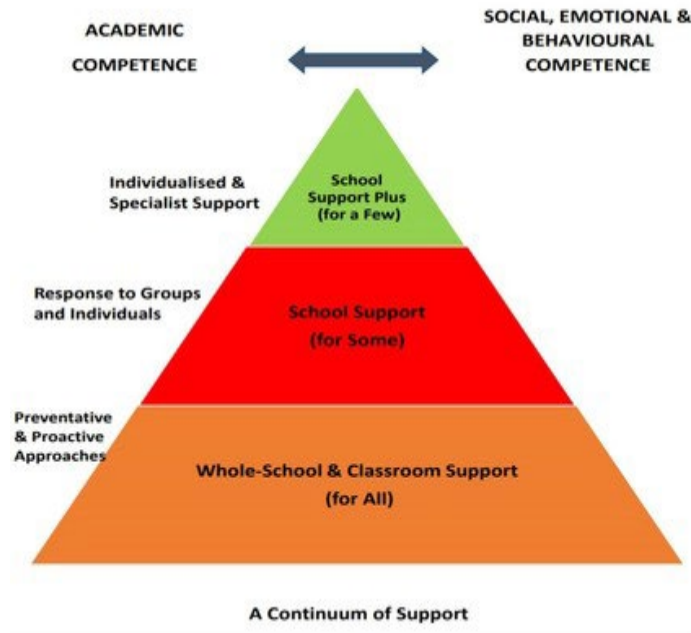
We actively encourage all students with additional educational needs to remain in school until they have completed the Senior Cycle Programmes. We offer the Leaving Certificate Established (LCE) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA).

There is a merit system in place in the school for students who make an effort to learn, to participate and to behave. Teachers are encouraged to issue merits regularly to students as a means of positive reinforcement.

WELLBEING

The Additional Educational Needs Department recognises the importance of the promotion of student wellbeing. Student wellbeing is fostered in all Learning Support/Resource classes as it is in every other mainstream class and extracurricular activities. Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School adopts a whole-school approach to student wellbeing.

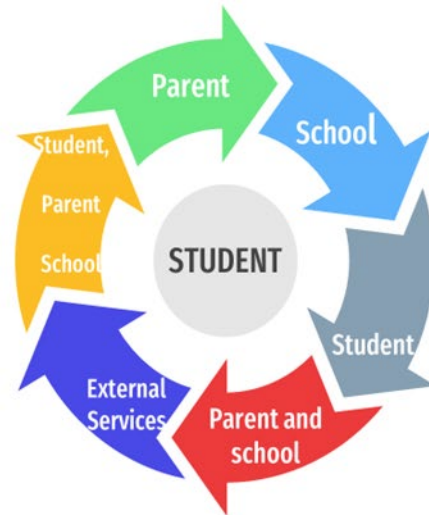
As part of the whole-school approach to the promotion of wellbeing, Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School follows the Guidelines on the Continuum of Support as set out by NEPS. The Additional Educational Needs Department plays an important role in following the Continuum of Support in relation to students with additional educational needs.



The Additional Educational Needs Department puts in place Student Support Files (SSFs) for students with additional educational needs who are identified as needing School Support for Some and School Support for a Few in consultation with senior school management, Year Heads, Class Tutors, subject teachers, parents/guardians and students. Each SSF is individualised with individual priority needs and targets on each. SSFs are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that the needs of the student(s) are being met.

Furthermore, throughout the school, there are Wellbeing Spaces in addition to a Multi-Sensory Room in the ASD Class which students with additional educational needs can access during supervised movement breaks from classes.

How the AEN circle works in schools



Role of parents

The Irish Constitution states that parents have primary responsibility for educating their child. While the school works in partnership with parents in order to provide which ever supports it can, the school is limited by law and by resources in what it can and cannot provide. Below is some information as to how the system works.

For the school to best support your child, it is essential that the school is given a copy of all reports by relevant services (for e.g. HSE, CAMHS, NEPS) are given to the school by you, **the parent**. It is not the school's responsibility to find or access these reports and the school does not have the authority to access them from the HSE or other services. If you wish for your child to receive supports, they may be entitled to, the parent must supply the school with all relevant reports.

Partnership and communication with the school

In OLM Drimnagh, we pride ourselves in our excellent AEN Department. The work that they do in terms of testing students, ensuring all supports are in place from submitted reports, making applications for additional supports and Reasonable Accommodation for State Exams cannot be underestimated. For this system to work, however, it must be in partnership with parents.

Parents are obliged to, on occasion, attend meetings, to provide input on the creation of Student Support Plans, and to discuss supports, reports, etc. Parents are also expected to sign and return necessary application forms in a timely fashion.

There has been an unfortunate increase in the number of parents who did not engage with the AEN Department in relation to applications or not showing up for appointments. These are essential to ensure students receive the supports they may be entitled to. By not engaging or not showing up for meetings/appointments, parents are letting their own child and others on waiting lists down. This cannot continue.

The Board has approved that there will be a limit on attempts to engage with parents who do not reciprocate. Should a parent fail to show up for appointments three times, with no communication or explanation as to why, the AEN Department will move on to the next student and their family. If an appointment has been made with an educational psychologist for assessment and the parent does not engage, the student will be moved back to the bottom of the priority list. The Board will write directly to those parents who do not engage with the school.

As a school, we respectfully ask that parents engage with our AEN Department, keep appointments, and treat our staff with the same respect you would expect to be treated with yourself. They do wonderful work with students and the school simply could not function without the wonderful AEN staff.

National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

Some students may already have a NEPS report, which outlines supports that students could receive in school for a learning disability. Please ensure the school is given a copy of these reports.

Students may arrive to school with no NEPS report, who may need one. Please note that there is an extreme shortage of NEPS assessments available to schools. We do our best to accommodate these, but you will appreciate that we have to prioritise based on all students' needs.

Some medical or psychological professionals write letters to schools demanding the school gets a NEPS assessment for a student. This is not how the system works and they have no authority to make such demands. The only service which can accommodate assessments is NEPS and they grant very few assessments. A request or demand from any other service cannot influence the school's priority list.

Parents are welcome to have their child privately assessed and ensure the school receives a copy of the report after it has been completed. The school can then arrange supports for the student in question. If an application needs to be made to the DES for additional supports, the school will work with parents to do this. Please note, the school does not fund private assessments, as it is not given any financial support by the DES to do so.

SNA access

SNA access in secondary school is very different from that provided in primary schools. The Special Needs Assistant (SNA) scheme is designed to assist children with special educational needs **who also have additional and significant care needs**. **Circular 0030/2014** provides details of the primary care needs for which SNA support will be provided and details the types of secondary care associated tasks which SNAs may often perform, but only once they have been allocated to students to provide for primary care needs. The school is allocated a number

of SNAs by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). The NCSE decides which students have SNA access. Only the NCSE has this authority. No written psychological report or letter from services or doctors will grant a student SNA access. The school can apply for an exceptional review of its allocation of SNAs, but it does not mean that the student will be granted access. That decision rests with the NCSE.

Language exemptions (except for Irish)

There is no provision for language exemptions in the DES. No psychological report can change that. In OLM, all students must choose a language (French/Spanish). Given the size of the school and the number of teaching staff allocated to us, the school cannot, under any circumstances, set up an additional 'language exemption' class on the timetable. All students study a language at Junior and Senior Cycle and teachers differentiate to ensure that students can access the curriculum.

Irish exemptions

Only students who meet the criteria under **Circular 0055/2022** can be granted an Irish exemption. The criteria:

- A student moving from a different country without previous experience of learning the Irish language who is not less than 12 years of age on the day of their enrolment or who is enrolling following the completion of the full course of primary education recognised by another state.
- An exemption from the study of Irish **may be granted** to a student:
 1. who presents with significant literacy difficulties that are persistent.
 2. who, presents with a standardised score on a discrete test at/below the 10th percentile.
 3. who experiences a high level of multiple and persistent needs.
 4. whose school has substantial written evidence that these needs persist.
 5. whose school has substantial written evidence that these individualised Student Support Plans have been implemented over not less than two school years.
 6. who has been given every reasonable opportunity to participate in the learning of Irish in mainstream classes for as long as possible.
- A student in a recognised special class or who was previously enrolled in a recognised special school or class or who has a recommendation and has been deemed eligible for a place in a recognised special school and/or in a special class in a mainstream school, that student is automatically entitled to an exemption from the study of Irish without an application.

Steps required for a valid application for an exemption from the study of Irish.

1. A **parent/guardian must make an application in writing to the school** for a Certificate of Exemption from the study of Irish.
2. **The school will contact the parent/guardian** to discuss the application and confirm the sub-paragraph on which the application is based (as outlined in section 2.2 above)
3. **Only criteria contained in the Circular can be considered** as grounds for an exemption from the study of Irish and no other exceptional circumstances can be considered.
4. Where a **decision is reached by the Department of Education** that an exemption from the study of Irish may be granted a signed Certificate of Exemption will be issued to the parent(s)/guardian(s)/student and a copy will be held by the school in the student's file.

N.B. If a parent/guardian does not confirm the sub-paragraph under which the application is based then the application is null, and void and no further processing of the application will take place.

This policy and these practices will be reviewed annually by the AEN Department in consultation with the Principal and Deputy Principal.

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on 2nd September 2024 and is reviewed annually following input from the AEN Department and senior management team.

Signed:



Chairperson of Board of Management

Date: 2nd September 2024

Date of next review: September 2025

Signed:



Principal/Secretary to the Board of Management

Date: 2nd September 2024