

Special Class for Pupils with Specific Speech and Language Disorder

Enrolment and Operational Policy

St. Kevin's National School - Rathdown Road, Greystones, Co. Wicklow

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Introductory Statement

This plan was initially developed following the establishment of a Special Class for pupils with Specific Speech and Language Disorders in St. Kevin's National School. The 'Language Class' first took in pupils in September 2010. This policy is written as per the guidelines set out in Circular 0038/2007 and is further informed by the Evaluation of Special Classes for pupils with SSLD undertaken by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) Inspectorate in 2005.

Terminology

The terms developmental language disorder (DLD), specific speech and language disorder (SSLD), specific speech and language impairment (SSLI) are used interchangeably in the literature to describe a child's speech and language presentation. The term DLD is favoured by the Irish Association of Speech and Language Therapists (IASLT). However, the term SSLD is used throughout DES documentation. Both terms DLD/SSLD will be used in the form in this document.

Rationale

Special classes for pupils with SSLD are attached to mainstream primary schools. Following the identification of a need for such a class in County Wicklow, a Junior Class was established in St. Kevin's. It is the result of a co-ordinated drive between the Department of Education and Skills, the Health Service Executive, the local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) and the approval of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). A full-time teacher is assigned to the class, and the class operates at a reduced pupil teacher ratio of 7:1. Eligible pupils may spend up to two years in such classes (DES Circular 0038/2007). It should be noted that the placement is for two years, with a possibility of leaving after one year or staying for a third year if the Admissions Advisory Committee advise this. At the end of the placement, the children return to either their mainstream school or to a school of their parents'/guardians' choosing. It is the responsibility of the parents/ guardians to ensure their child has a place secured in another school. When children have finished their placement in St. Kevin's they cannot remain in the school. Schools will be asked to complete a request form to hold a place for the child but they are not obligated to do so.

Objectives of the Language Class

- To develop to optimal levels the child's academic and communication skills through intensive teaching, and speech and language therapy.
- To maximize parental involvement in the above process by maintaining open communication.
- To ensure the child experiences meaningful integration within the school.
- To maintain open communication with the school of origin/return and other professionals working with the child so that the speech and language class intervention will be of maximum benefit to the child.

Organisation

The Language Class is run independently of St. Kevin's and is managed by a multi-agency Admissions Advisory Committee (AAC). This committee comprises of the following:

- The school Principal
- The Speech and Language Therapist assigned to the class
- The Speech and Language Therapy Manager from the local area
- The Language Class teacher
- Designated Educational Psychologist from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS).

The AAC meet to discuss and relate all procedural aspects of the running of the Language Class. Minutes are recorded and distributed to all members of the committee.

The role of the AAC can be described as follows

- To make decisions regarding retention/discharge of children in the language class
- To evaluate and process new applications in the light of DES criteria (DES Circular 0038,2007)
- To prioritise applicants deemed eligible according to DES criteria

The AAC meet in March each year, but may meet more frequently should the need emerge.

In the event of an unresolved disparity re enrolment/retention a vote should be taken by the members of the AAC. This should be noted in the minutes and brought to the attention of the Board of Management. Any member of the AAC reserves the right to write directly to the Board of Management to explain his/her position in any decision.

Procedures for Referrals

Applications for referrals are accepted from Speech and Language Therapists and Psychologists. Applications should be made in writing to the principal of St. Kevin's N.S.

The closing date for referrals for the school year is in early March each year.

Referrals must be accompanied by the following:

5 copies of:

1. The completed application form with signed parental consent for the application to be made.
2. As recent a **Psychological Report** as possible (within 18 months, at most, of referral date). This should include results of a comprehensive assessment of both non-verbal and verbal ability, including subtest results.

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3. An up-to-date **Speech and Language report** (within 6 months of referral date). If the report is more than 3 months old, a qualitative report on the progress with therapy since the assessment will also need to be furnished to the school).) confirming a diagnosis of specific language impairment and/or a severe specific speech disorder, or a severe developmental verbal dyspraxia. The report should include:
 - Speech and Language Diagnosis
 - Summary of case history information
 - History of the child's involvement to date with speech and language therapy services including the primary areas of therapy focus and therapy outcomes.
 - Description of the child's current profile, including standardised assessment results of receptive and expressive language development. Standard scores, percentile ranks, standard deviations and age equivalents should be included where possible. Earlier Assessment results to be included where possible.
 - Where relevant, an indication of the severity of the child's speech impairment i.e. current level of intelligibility, phonological system, oral motor functioning. A short transcription would also be helpful.
 - Details of the impact of the child's language and/or speech impairment on his/her educational progress and social/emotional development.
 - If the child is multilingual, full case history details on all languages to be included, and where possible the impact of the child's difficulties in their other languages.
4. **School/Pre-school Teacher's Report** which might describe or convey the impact of the child's specific language impairment on his/her educational progress and social/emotional development. Details on educational history and SNA involvement if applicable to be included.
5. **Communication Rating Checklist and Questionnaire** - To be completed by parent/guardian, teacher and SLT
6. **Other Reports detailing co-occurring Disorders and Needs** to be included (e.g. Audiology, OT, Medical, Social, Psychiatry). If the child is on a waiting list for another service, details are to be included.

Part of the application forms includes a parental/guardian consent form. This is signed by parent/s or guardian/s indicating consent for the AAC to contact any of the professionals involved in submitting reports, where clarification or outstanding information is required.

The reports are then made available for the AAC to review in advance of meeting should they wish. This group meets to discuss all referrals and advises the Board of Management as to the children who should be offered places in the language class.

Referring professionals are asked to ensure that parents/guardians are aware of the limited number of places available.

Criteria for Enrolment

The criteria for enrolment in special classes for pupils with specific speech and language have been set by the Department of Education and Skills (DES). A pupil enrolled in a special class for pupils with specific speech and/or language disorder (SSLD) should meet each of the following criteria:

1. The pupil has been assessed by a psychologist on a standardised test of intellectual ability that places non-verbal ability within the average range or above. (i.e. non-verbal IQ of over 90)
2. The pupil has been assessed by a speech and language therapist on a standardised test of speech and language development that places performance in one or more of the main areas of speech and language development at two standard deviations or more below the mean or at a generally equivalent level (i.e. 2 standard deviations or below, at or below a standard score of 70).
3. The pupil's difficulties are not attributable to hearing impairment; where the pupil is affected to some degree by hearing impairment, the hearing threshold for the speech-related frequencies should be 40dB.
4. Emotional and behavioural disorders or a physical disability are not considered to be primary causes (DES Circular 0038/2007).

As the number of pupils in the language class is limited to seven, priority will be given to children living in Wicklow and in the age category of 5 to 9 years of age.

Review of Applications

The AAC will determine how many places are available. They will then process new applications. Children deemed not to meet the criteria will be identified. Pupils are prioritised based on their current needs.

- The school principal reports the recommendations of the AAC to the Board of Management of the school.
- The school principal will send a letter offering a place to successful applicants' parent/s or guardian/s. Parents/Guardians are required to complete and return an acceptance form by a set date if they are accepting a place for their child.
- When a place has been accepted in writing, the principal of the child's current school is informed by the Principal of St. Kevin's.
- Parents of unsuccessful applicants or those deemed unsuitable are informed by the school Principal.
- Referring Speech and Language Therapists are informed of the decision by the Class Senior Speech And Language Therapist after Board of Management approval.

Discharge Procedures

Should the AAC decide that a pupil is to be discharged from the Language Class, the parents/guardians are informed by the school principal following the AAC meeting. The Principal will make contact with the school to which the pupil is expected to return.

It is the role of the SLT and Language Class teacher to co-ordinate communication so that the pupil can be re-integrated successfully within his/her own school. This reintegration may take a number of forms including meetings, written reports, school visits or an accompanied visit with the pupil to re-familiarise him/her with their school. In an effort to reintegrate the student back into their base school, the base mainstream school will be requested to take the pupil for one day per week for 4 weeks through the month of May of their year of their departure from the Language Class. Mainstream teachers from the base school are invited to make contact if they wish to visit the Language Class prior to the pupil's departure.

Where appropriate, it is the role of the SLT to manage the transfer of the pupil back to local speech and language therapy service.

Waiting List

If there are more children eligible than places available, the AAC will draw up a prioritised waiting list. Should space arise, the next child will be offered a place. This list will operate for the remainder of that school year, should a vacancy arise during that time.

Spare Capacity

In incidents where there is spare capacity in the Language Class because of insufficient eligible children, the Board of Management may offer a place to a maximum of two pupils who do not meet the eligibility criteria but who could benefit from enrolment in the class for one year on a concessionary basis. Such placements must be supported by the recommendation of a speech and language therapist and/or psychologist. The question of continued enrolment of these pupils for a second year can only be considered once all eligible pupils have been accommodated. The NCSE and the local SENO will monitor such situations. (Circular 0038/2007)

Queries

Where a parent/guardian has a query in relation to the enrolment policy, they are encouraged to contact the school principal. If necessary, the AAC will meet with the parent/s or guardian/s to discuss the matter.

Appeals

Where a parent/guardian wishes to appeal a decision by the AAC to refuse enrolment of his/her child into the language class, they should write to the chairperson of the Board of Management setting out the grounds for appealing the decision. The Board of Management will then meet to review the decision. The review of the board will be limited to making a decision as to whether the language class enrolment policy was properly adhered to in relation to the child's application.

In the event that the original decision of the AAC is upheld, the parent/guardian has a right of appeal to the General Secretary, Appeals Administration Unit, Department of Education and Skills, Marlborough Street, Dublin 1. The appeal must be made within 42 calendar days from the date the decision of the Board of Management was notified to the parent/guardian concerned. The school principal is to ensure that parents are aware of this time limit in advance. The school must be informed in writing of the decision to appeal. The school will supply the parent/guardian with the relevant appeals application form.

Roles and Responsibilities

Collaborative Work Practices

As the language class is an inter-agency initiative involving the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the Health Service Executive (HSE), a team approach is used in all aspects of the management of the class.

A child-centred approach is used in the class, with the teacher, special needs assistant (SNA) and speech and language therapists working in partnership, sharing information, resources and methodologies. The teacher and therapist share all relevant information regarding the child.

At the beginning of the school year, they jointly draw up an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for each child, in consultation with the child's parent/s, and any other relevant professionals.

At the beginning of each term, the teacher shares the term plans with the therapist to identify topics/concepts that can be worked on jointly.

The teacher and SLT meet weekly to review individual student progress, update goals, plan group work and plan for the generalisation of speech and language therapy goals.

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Role of Admissions Advisory Committee

The Admissions Advisory Committee advises the Board of Management on language class policy and practice. The committee makes recommendations to the board on the enrolment, retention and discharge of children to the language class.

Role of Board of Management

The Board of Management liaises with the Health Service Executive, Department of Education and Skills, National Educational Psychological Service, Special Education Needs Organiser and other agencies in relation to the management of the language class. It is the responsibility of the board to ensure that staffing, support and resources are in place for the class, within the provisions made available by the DES. Having considered the recommendations of the Admissions Advisory Committee, the board makes decisions in relation to enrolment, retention and discharge of children in the language class.

Role of Language Class Teacher

The language class teacher assesses each child's personal, social and academic needs, and in consultation with the child, parent/guardian and speech and language therapist, devises an individual education plan (IEP). The teacher ensures that the child follows the regular primary school curriculum (with the exception of Irish), taking into account the child's speech and language abilities and the goals of the speech and language therapist. Lessons will have a particular focus on speech and/or language needs of the children.

Role of the Speech and Language Therapist

The role of the speech and language therapist in the language class is to assess the child's communication needs, through reviewing existing reports and through on-going assessment. A child's communication skills are maximised through individual diagnostic work and therapy. This therapy takes the form of targeted speech and language groups or individual sessions. The therapist may also wish to work in class, alongside the class teacher.

Role of Special Needs Assistant (SNA)

Special Needs Assistants (SNA) are assigned to individual children and the class, subject to DES criteria. The language class assistant is involved in monitoring IEP targets for individual children. The assistant undertakes curricular activities, speech and language programmes or occupational therapy activities, either on a 1:1 basis or in small groups in the classroom, under the direction of the teacher or therapist. The assistant also observes and monitors the children, sharing information with the teacher and therapist and completing behaviour charts under guidance, if required

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Role of School Principal

The principal is responsible for the day-to-day management of the class and the support of children, staff and parents/guardians. The principal liaises with the HSE in relation to the management of the language classes. The principal applies to the SENO for special needs assistant support, assistive technology (if required), and transport support for children in the language class. The principal liaises with the relevant school principals at times on intake and discharge. The principal also informs the SENO about language class enrolments, retention and discharges. It is for the principal to liaise with the Board of Management re AAC recommendations.

Role of the Manager of the Speech and Language Therapy Department (MSLT)

The role of the principal SLT is to lead the governance of the speech and language therapy service provision to the language class. The principal speech and language therapist oversees the SLT advisory role in the referral process to the language class, in consultation with the SLT team. The PSLT designate liaises with the Irish Association of Speech and Language Therapy / Irish Association of Speech and Language Therapy Managers on pertinent issues regarding SLT service provision to the language class to ensure local service is aligned to national standard practice.

Role of Educational Psychologist

The designated NEPS psychologist to the school is a member of the school's Admissions Advisory Committee. S/he has an advisory role on the committee in his/her capacity as educational psychologist. The NEPS psychologist provides a psychological service to the school. The psychologist consults with the school principal and relevant professionals associated with the language class to identify priorities for intervention by NEPS according to the NEPS model of service.

Role of Other School Staff

There is a high degree of cooperation between staff of the language class and staff of other classes in the school. Children in the language classes are generally integrated in their age-equivalent class group for certain curricular areas eg. PE and art.

Other Professionals/Agencies

Consultation occurs, as appropriate, with any professionals involved with the child including educational psychology, clinical psychology, occupational therapy etc. with parental consent. The therapist will ensure record of consent in accordance with HSE guidelines.

Curriculum and Programme Planning

The children in the language class follow the regular primary school curriculum but with reduced content. More emphasis will be placed on the language and vocabulary needed to access all areas of the curriculum. Irish is not taught

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in the language class. However, pupils may attend mainstream for Irish instruction, should the class teacher deem it appropriate.

Religious instruction may or may not take place according to the religious persuasions of the children in attendance. Pupils may on occasion be involved in whole school ceremonies.

Children are integrated into mainstream classes as much as the class teacher deems appropriate. They may attend for mixed activities, art, physical education etc. or any other subject areas where the class teacher feels they would benefit from attending a full class setting. It should be noted that overall responsibility for the organisation and teaching of the pupils in the language class is the responsibility of the language class teacher, despite integration to the mainstream class.

Data on Incoming Pupils

The Language class teacher may wish to ascertain specific details regarding work covered, strengths, weaknesses etc. from the pupil's current class teacher/school prior to the school holidays. With parental consent, a questionnaire may be sent to schools for current teachers to give more detailed accounts and to help facilitate a smooth transition for the pupil to St. Kevin's Language Class.

Integration

The children in the language class are involved in all aspects of normal school life. They will play at break times with their peers, attend school tours, concerts, trips etc. They will be included in whole school assemblies, celebrations, sporting events etc. Also, on occasion, pupils from other classes may be invited to come to the language class for short periods of time to discourage any negative impressions or stereotypes being developed.

Assessment and Record Keeping

- Assessment in the language class will follow our school assessment policy.
- Formal assessments will be administered as deemed necessary by the class teacher or the SLT.
- All files relating to enrolment are retained by the school. The SLT will receive a copy for his/her use. Locked filing cabinets are available in both the language classroom and the SLT room. The SLT will keep records on pupils in accordance with HSE guidelines.
- Copies of any reports written during the period of enrolment of any pupil should be provided to the class teacher and Speech and Language Therapist.

Further Referrals

Should either the class teacher or the Speech and Language Therapist wish to make a Stage three referral, he/she must communicate this to the school Principal. This is normal procedure for any pupils under the care of the Board of Management in a primary school.

Transport

A child who is enrolled in the Language Class may be eligible for free transport to the school, subject to the DES School Transport Scheme. Details and application form for school transport are sent by the principal to a child's parent/guardian when a language class place is accepted.

Parental Involvement

Good communication lines between parents/guardians are highly valued in the Language Class. An open day is held during the 2nd week of June where parents/guardians and other family members are invited in to see St. Kevin's and to visit the classroom. Parents/guardians are encouraged to maintain regular contact with the school. This will include the following:

- Parent/teacher meetings as requested by either party.
- Parent/SLT meetings as requested by either party.
- Liaising with teacher to produce Individual Education Plan for each pupil.
- Use the child's home/school diary for day-to-day communication.
- Discuss any concerns as they arise.
- Monitor and support homework both from the teacher and the SLT.
- Provide a written explanation for any school absences.

Ratification and Review:

This policy was reviewed and ratified at the Board of Management meeting on 22/05/18.