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Co. Luimnigh.**

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Policy and Guidance for Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) in St. Fergus National School

Introduction

This document outlines the policy and guidance for the effective utilisation and support of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) in our School. It aims to ensure that SNAs play a vital role in facilitating the inclusion and holistic development of students with special educational needs (SEN) within our school community.

SNAs are appointed by the Board of Management of St. Fergus' NS, subsequent to the allocation of SNA hours for the whole School by the NCSE each year. Depending on the cumulative number of hours allocated to the School, they may be appointed full-time or part-time.

All SNAs, whether full-time or part-time, will be required to sign a contract which lays out the terms of their employment.

This policy was devised following a consultative process with all interested parties, and is guided by the relevant legislation at the time, including, The Education Welfare Act (2000), The EPSEN Act (2004 and implemented in full in 2024) and DES Circulars, 07/02, 08/03, 13/04, 02/05 and 18/23. SENO input surrounding SNA deployment was considered following an Exceptional SNA Review in the School Year 2023/24. The need for a reviewed policy arose from the increase of SNA allocation to St. Fergus' NS and also from the opening of our two ASD Classes in 2021 and 2023 respectively.

Rationale

Students with special educational needs require additional support to access educational opportunities and reach their full potential. SNAs provide crucial assistance to these students, enabling them to participate fully in school life and achieve academic and personal success.

This policy was formulated :

- To provide staff and parents with clear guidelines and expectations with regard to the SNA role and responsibilities within the school
- To ensure each SNA appreciates and understands the important role they have in contributing positively to the learning experiences of the children and the overall efficiency of the school
- To ensure best practice and continuity in how we work in St. Fergus' N.S.

Aims

- To facilitate the recognition of SNAs as valuable members of staff in a whole school context
- To provide a supportive framework for SNAs to effectively assist students with special educational needs.
- To ensure the effective deployment of SNAs in enhancing the social skills and self-esteem of the children with Special Educational Needs
- To enable the SNA to be an effective support to the class teacher
- To provide optimum learning experiences for all children through judicious use of the skills and talents of the SNA. This includes promoting inclusive practices that foster the participation and engagement of all students
- To enhance collaboration and communication among school staff, parents, and external agencies to meet the diverse needs of students.
- To clarify the tasks and duties to be undertaken by the SNA
- To ensure accountability and effective record keeping.

Roles

The Principal has responsibility for:

- Providing leadership and guidance in the implementation of the SNA policy and procedures. This includes co-ordinating the integration and devising the role and profile of the SNA
- Assigning role specific and child specific tasks to the SNA in association with the class teacher
- Monitoring the effectiveness of the SNAs contribution to the needs of designated children

- Promoting in-service training. It is important for SNAs' to continue to up skill by attending relevant training sessions and seeking opportunities for professional development to enhance skills and knowledge. This will enhance their professional development and effectiveness in their role.
- The Board of Management will support this professional development.
- Ensure regular communication and collaboration between SNAs, teachers, parents, and external support services.

SENCO – Special Educational Needs Coordinator (Deputy Principal)

- Liaises with Outside Agencies and SENCO to ensure those pupils who need SNA support receive it
- Ensure SNA support is available for those who need it in a class situation
- Identify appropriate tasks to be completed in the School context by the SNAs e.g. Staff meetings, In-Service Days for Teaching Staff, 10 minutes before/after school, etc.
- Oversees that all pupils who need SNA support receive it. This is reviewed regularly.
- Coordinate the devising/review of SSPs and SSP+s and ensure SNA input is received where appropriate.

Class Teachers

- Identify students who may require SNA support and collaborate with the SENCO and Principal to identify students who may require SNA support and collaborate with the SEN Coordinator to develop SSPs and SSP+s where appropriate.
- Identify the appropriate tasks to be completed by the SNAs within their classroom. This includes providing guidance and support to SNAs regarding classroom routines, teaching strategies, and behaviour management techniques and strategies
- Provide a suitable seating arrangement for the SNA and child in the mainstream setting
- Collaborate with the SNA with regard to planning and timetabling within their classroom
- Devise a list of classroom tasks to be undertaken by the SNA when time is available
- Foster a collaborative and inclusive classroom environment where all students feel valued and supported in collaboration with the SNAs as required.
- Communicate effectively with SNAs to monitor student progress and address any concerns.

Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)

- There are six SNAs presently employed in the school. They are considered an important part of the school team and carry out duties of a non-teaching nature.
- The SNA always works under the direction of the class teacher or Principal
- The teacher plans lessons and directs learning. The SNA provides support in assisting the pupil to access the curriculum.
- The SNA should be familiar with all relevant school policies, in particular the School Code of Behaviour and Child Safety Statement.
- Assist students with personal care needs, mobility, and access to educational materials
- Work in tandem with all other staff members to implement behaviour management strategies in collaboration with class teachers and other school staff
- Maintain regular communication with class teachers to ensure consistency and continuity in student support.

Guidelines for SNAs:

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| <p>Hours of Work</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The full time SNA is paid for 32 hours per week and the part-time SNA is expected to work the number of hours outlined by the NCSE. The SNA is required to work normal classroom hours and in addition to attend before and after school in order to help with the preparation and tidying of classrooms. The time before and after schools to be agreed by the Board of Management. • In addition, the SNA must be available for an additional 72 hours (Public Service Agreement, Croke Park) per year outside of the normal school year must be worked. These hours are at the discretion of the Board of Management in consultation with the Principal and SNAs. |
| <p>Confidentiality</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due discretion is expected in all matters of a confidential nature. This is particularly important regarding the privacy rights of students and their families. |
| <p>Times and Timetables</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SNAs will be given a timetable by the SENCO at the start of the year. SNAs break times vary due to the nature of the needs of the School. Two break times (15mins and 30mins) will be built into the timetables of all SNAs. • As part of the SNA contract, SNAs are required to spend ten minutes each morning and evening preparing, tidying and |

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| | <p>organising the classroom or assisting with arrival/dispersal of pupils. SNAs also work 12 days (72 hours) outside the school calendar at the discretion of the Board of Management and Principal. This is on a pro rata basis for part-time SNAs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class teacher will give the SNA a copy of class timetable also pointing out where the child will work with class or at own level during the day. Suitable times for time-outs will also be identified. |
| <p>Planning and Reporting</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SNA should document progress and set targets met in their SNA Recording Book. This Book should also record any incidents where the care needs of the child are evident. It should be kept in a secure setting in the SNAs base classroom. • A copy of items recorded in the plan may be copied and given to SENCO, Principal and Teacher. • A copy of the child's SSP/SSP+s will be available to the Teacher and Principal on Aladdin and the SNA will be made aware of what is relevant to them in the care needs of the child. • Time for the teacher to meet with the SNA re. planning should be organised regularly. Teacher should outline expectations for child and SNA. • SNA must refer all matters on curriculum, classroom management, discipline or incidents of concerns etc. to the classroom teacher |
| <p>Level and type of classroom Assistance</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information received on children, and observations made in classrooms, need to be handled sensitively and carefully • The focus will be on an "Enabling mode", i.e. developing children's independence skills and avoiding the "Velcro mode". This underpins all that we as a school work towards. SNAs are encouraged to follow the gradual release of support on the pathway to independence. • Avoid over-talking and providing a 'running commentary' of what to do next – this allows the child to concentrate and think independently. • Match amount and level of language to child's ability while taking into consideration the level of concentration(quiet) that is required in any given situation and in the setting. • Support the child in the steps involved in a task and avoid giving the solution to a task or problem. Instead encourage the child |

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| | <p>come up with the answer by questioning and prompting.</p> |
| <p>Physical contact</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to have as little physical contact as possible, if the child's attention is required, place a hand lightly on the child's shoulder • Physical contact may be required to protect a pupil from harm to themselves or others. SNAs must remember that School staff adopt the approach of being in "loco parentis" when carrying out their duties. • Help where necessary with changing for PE/swimming etc. while encouraging independence • Actions of affection from a child towards an SNA should be handled sensitively but also appropriately • To carry out some activities, an SNA may need to guide the child's body. This should be done by gently touching the shoulder, back, arms, hands or lower leg only • O.T. Activities e.g. Therapeutic Brushing, in keeping with relevant OT Reports and recommendations. • Nappy changing, in keeping with St. Fergus NS Intimate Care Policy |
| <p>Parental contact</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SNAs are encouraged to build a positive relationship based on trust with the parents of children with SEN • If required at the end of the school day, escort the child to the school gate and greet the parent • It is helpful to chat about how the day went or upcoming events but do not pass on information regarding child's educational progress • Parents with questions, requests or concerns regarding school policy or practice should be referred directly to the class teacher or the Principal. This applies to direct face- to face communication or indirect telephone communication. Parents should contact teachers for information on the child's progress. • It is not appropriate for parents to have a private phone number of a member of staff or to contact the SNA outside of school hours • If there are any minor incidents the Class Teacher/SET/Principal may put a note in the homework diary/on Aladdin. Any major incidents should be reported to the teacher. |

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| <p>Seating Arrangements</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A SNA should only sit with a child with SEN when and where deemed necessary by the class teacher • Allow some time during day where child doesn't have SNA sitting with him • Avoid blocking view of another child |
| <p>Supervision</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>C.f. St. Fergus' NS Supervision Policy</i> • Supervise pupils from a distance if possible • Supervision in the yard and lunch room should promote social interaction and inclusion. After lunch SNA should assist pupils to form a line on the yard outside door and await the teachers. • The SNA should never supervise alone in the classroom. If the class teacher leaves the room at any stage, the classroom door should remain open and the neighbouring teacher should be requested to supervise the class until the teacher returns. • Be aware of children who pose a flight risk |
| <p>Movement Breaks/Sensory Sessions</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Movement Breaks and Sensory Sessions should follow a specific timetable to be most effective. There will be times when these sessions will be needed at short notice and more regularly for some SEN children. SNA timetables may need to be flexible at these times. • The content should be worked out with the help from Physiotherapists and/or Occupational Therapist in conjunction with the teacher and a specific programme should be followed. • Teachers should be informed of what's happening and of progress being made • Working one to one is best when helping a child to learn a new skill/game however working in pairs or with a small group may develop social skills, inclusion and teamwork. Due to short span of concentration timeouts are necessary daily and should last 10 minutes. |
| <p>Medication</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The School's Administration of Medicines Policy should be understood and followed at all times • Store all medicines appropriately in line with our Health and Safety Policy. |
| <p>Relevant work</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SNAs work under the guidance of the classroom teacher and should not be left in sole charge of a pupil or class. They may however work on their own, within the classroom, with children |

provided that the work in question has been allocated by the class teacher.

- SNAs may work outside of the classroom with a child for movement breaks/sensory breaks and on lessons such as social/life skills etc.
- In mainstream settings the care needs of the child take priority as per Circular 0030/2014.

The work of SNAs may include any of the following:

- Preparation and tidying up of classrooms before, during and after school
- Assisting school children to board and alight from school buses. Where necessary travel as escort during school hours on school buses may be required e.g. School Tours
- Special assistance as necessary for children with particular difficulties e.g. helping special needs pupils with typing, writing, computers or other use of equipment
- Assisting children to stay on task, follow classroom procedures and interact appropriately
- Assisting children in establishing and maintaining a consistent routine
- Assisting children to build self-esteem and to develop independence
- Assistance with clothing, feeding, toileting and general hygiene and being mindful of health and safety needs of the pupil.
- Promoting the importance of personal hygiene and report any difficulties to the class teacher.
- Assistance with accessing the curriculum as far as is possible for children with SEN at their level
- Assisting on out-of-school visits, walks, examinations and similar activities.
- Accompanying and supervising their assigned pupil on swimming outings
- Where direct assistance is needed to change into swimming gear, specific parental consent must be received in writing.
- Assisting the teachers in the supervision of pupils during assembly, recreation, arrival and dispersal from the classroom for one reason or another.

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accompanying individuals or small groups who may have to be withdrawn temporarily from the classroom for one reason or another. • General assistance to the class teachers, under the direction of the Principal, with duties of a non-teaching nature. (Special needs assistants may not act as either substitute or temporary teachers. In no circumstances may they be left in sole charge of a class or group of children). • Participation with school improvement planning, where appropriate, and co-operation with any such changes with policies and practices arising from the school improvement process. • Engagement with parents of special needs pupils in both formal and informal structures as required and directed by school management. • The encouragement of good attendance and punctuality • Acting as a positive role model for the children in their care • Other duties appropriate to the class level as may be determined by the needs of the pupils and the school from time to time. Special Needs Assistants may be re-assigned to other work appropriate to the class when special needs pupils are absent or when particular urgent work demands arise. • Work carried out during 'Croke Park' hours should be related to SEN provision in the school. |
| <p>Staff Meetings</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SNAs may be required to attend Staff Meetings when issues of relevance to their own particular work are up for discussion. • On days of In-Service ancillary, SNAs may be required to attend school to complete tasks laid out by class teachers/Principal. |
| <p>Rotation of Classes/Roles</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the discretion of the Principal and under the direction of the Principal/SENCO, SNAs will rotate between classes/age groups/mainstream/ASD Class settings. • It is imperative that SNAs are broadly familiar with all pupils in need of additional support. Priority needs will require immediate cover/response if another SNA is absent or no available substitute cover is available. |

Developing the Role of the SNA

It is the class teacher's responsibility to ensure that the SNA is clear about where help is needed. Planning together will be required occasionally at the class teachers and SENCO discretion. Provide opportunities for SNAs to contribute ideas and feedback on improving support structures and resources

Teachers and SNAs will foster relationships to ensure open communication is established, maintained and valued in their respective roles.

- Daily diaries or diaries recording significant events are essential
- An atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect is fostered
- Regular meetings with the Principal, SENCO and the SNAs are good opportunities to discuss issues and address concerns. It will also involve regularly review and evaluation of the effectiveness of SNA support in meeting the needs of students with special educational needs
- So that children do not build an unhealthy dependency on the SNA it is desirable that the SNA, rather than work exclusively with one child, should work with the whole group of children around the designated child's table. In that way several children in the classroom get the benefit of the SNA's support.
- SNAs allocated to children with physical disabilities will support them as needs require both within the classroom and outside it. This may include shadowing the child while in the playground or helping him to make his way in and out of the school.
- On days when the teaching staff are attending In-service courses, SNAs will report for work as usual. They will be assigned duties to help the classroom organisation of the absent teachers i.e. preparation of classroom displays, organisation of the classroom libraries, preparation of teaching equipment, photocopying etc.

Contract of Employment

SNAs are not specifically assigned to an individual child but rather to the school as a whole. The school operates, as directed by the DES on a 'last in, first out' policy. However, it must be noted that all positions are up for regular review in association with the DES, the BOM, NEPS, and NCSE.

Seniority

The sequence in which special need assistants are appointed to the school determines their seniority. Seniority is important in determining which special need assistant(s) should be offered reduced hours or have their employment terminated when the allocation of the school is reduced. The seniority listing will be used in determining 'last in, first out' for the purpose of redundancy.

The Board of Management determines the seniority based on special need assistants' date of commencement of duty as an SNA in the school.

Success Criteria

This policy is aimed at making a difference to the teaching and learning of children with Special Educational Needs in our school. We will know that the policy is achieving its aims when

- children with Special Educational Needs are included in whole school activities
- children are experiencing a safe and stimulating environment
- the children are becoming independent learners and acquiring life skills
- the child is reaching the targets set out in School Support Plans/School Support Plans + .
- positive feedback is received from teachers, parents, and external agencies regarding the effectiveness of SNA support.

Ratification and Review

This policy and guidance document shall be ratified by the School's Board Of Management and reviewed annually to ensure it remains reflective of best practices and the evolving needs of our school community. Any revisions or updates shall be communicated to all relevant stakeholders.

This plan was formally ratified by the Board of management on 30th May 2024.

The plan will be implemented by the teachers and SNAs supported by the Board of Management from .

Signed: _____

FR. TIM CURTIN

Chairperson Board of Management

Date: 30th May 2024

Signed: _____

DEIRDRE KENNELLY

Principal

Date: 30th May 2024