

Scoil Mhuire,

Davidstown

Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) Policy and Guidelines

SNAs are appointed by the Board of Management subsequent to the allocation of SNA hours, to the school by the SENO, to facilitate the inclusion of children. Depending on the cumulative number of hours allocated to the school they may be appointed on a full-time or part-time basis.

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

The Policy was devised following a consultative process with all interested parties, and is guided by the relevant legislation such as The Education Welfare Act 2000 and the EPSEN Act 2004 and DES Circulars 07/02, 08/03, 24/03, 13/04, 02/05.

Rationale

The policy was formulated:

- To provide clear guidelines and expectations with regard to the SNA role and responsibilities within the school
- To ensure each SNA appreciates and understands the importance of the role in contributing positively to the learning experiences of the children and the overall efficiency of the school.
- To ensure best practice and continuity in the school.

Aims

- To facilitate the recognition SNAs as valuable members of staff in a whole school context
- 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 use of the skills and talents of the SNA
- To clarify the tasks and duties to be undertaken by the SNA
- To ensure accountability and effective record keeping.

Staff Roles

The Principal has responsibility for

- Co-ordinating the integration and devising the role profile of the SNA
- Monitoring the effectiveness of the SNAs contribution to the needs of designated children with the teacher
- Promoting in-service training. The Board of Management may fund or part fund this professional development.
- Ensure SNA support is available for those who need it in a class situation and identify the appropriate tasks to be completed by the SNAs

Special Educational Teachers

- Assume responsibility for IEPs in consultation with all relevant parties including the parents, SNA, class teacher and principal.

Class Teachers

- Provide a suitable seating arrangement for the SNA and child in the mainstream setting
- Collaborate with the SNA with regard to planning and timetabling
- Devise a list of classroom tasks to be undertaken by the SNA when time is available e.g. Staff meetings, 15 minutes before/after school, etc.

SNAs

- SNAs 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
- 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 policy, in particular the school Code of Behaviour and Child Protection guidelines.

Guidelines for Special Needs Assistants

Hours of Work

- The full time SNA is expected to work 32 hours per week and the part-time SNA is expected to work the number of hours outlined by the NCSE.
- In addition 12 additional days per year outside of the normal school year must be worked. (On pro-rata basis for part-time SNA)
- These days are at the discretion of the Board of Management in consultation with the Principal and SNAs.

Confidentiality Due discretion is expected in all matters of a confidential nature.

Times and Timetables

- SNAs will be given a timetable by the Principal at the start of the year where the SNA is allocated to two or more children.
- As part of the SNA contract, SNAs are required to spend fifteen minutes each morning and evening preparing, tidying and organising the classroom.
- SNAs also work 12 days 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.
- 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.

Planning and Reporting

- SNA should document progress and set targets made on given time period i.e. 2 months. This plan should also record any incidents where the care needs of the child are evident.
- A copy of this SNA's plan should be given to SET, Principal and Teacher.
- A copy of the SET's IEP should be given to the Teacher, Principal and SNA.
- Time for the teacher to meet with the SNA re. planning should be organised when drawing up IEPs. 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

Level and type of Classroom Assistance

- Information received on children, and observations made in classrooms, need to be handled sensitively and carefully
- Avoid over-talking and providing a 'running commentary' of what to do next – this allows the child to concentrate and think independently
- Explain how to do tasks but avoid giving the solution to a task or problem. Instead encourage the child come up with the answer by questioning and prompting.

Physical contact

- 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
- Help where necessary with changing for PE 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, eg sensory 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.

Parental contact

- 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 put a note in the homework diary. Any major incidents should be reported to the teacher.

Seating Arrangements

- 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
- SNA should also have their own chair and table not beside the child.

Supervision

- 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 the classroom door and await the teacher.
- 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 mindful of danger of a child absconding.

Timeout Sessions

- Time out sessions should follow a specific timetable to be most effective.
- 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.
- Teacher 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.

Medication

- The school's Administration of Medicines Policy should be understood and followed at all times
- Administer medication discreetly in the classroom
- Only prescribed medication should be given
- Store all medicines appropriately in line with our Health and Safety Policy.

Relevant work

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

Work may include any of the following:

- Preparation and tidying up of classrooms
- Assisting school children to board and alight from school buses. Where necessary, travel as escort during school hours on school buses may be required.

- 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.
- Assistance with accessing the curriculum as far as is possible for children with SEN
- 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.
- Promoting the importance of personal hygiene and report any difficulties to the class teacher.
- Assisting the teachers in the supervision of pupils during assembly, recreation and dispersal from the classroom for one reason or another.
- 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 grade 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 grade when special needs pupils are absent or when particular urgent work demands arise.

Staff Meetings

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.

Developing the Role of the SNA

- It is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that the SNA is clear about where help is needed. Planning together is essential
- It is also the teacher's responsibility to affirm and outwardly value the role of the SNA
- Daily diaries or diaries recording significant events are essential

- An atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect is fostered
- Regular meetings with the principal/deputy principal and the SNAs are good opportunities to discuss issues and address concerns
- 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. However, during lunch break each SNA must have direct responsibility for a particular child. The school operates 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 a 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 Individual Education Plans.

Ratification and Review

This plan was formally ratified by the Board of management on _____.

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

It will be reviewed every 2 years.

Signed: _____ Date: _____
Chairperson, BoM