



Merlin Woods Primary School

SEN & Inclusion Policy

Actions	Date
Initial Draft	March 2026
Staff Consultation	March 2026
Parent Consultation	April 2026
Pupil Consultation	April 2026
Ratified by BOM	

Introduction

This policy was drawn up in consultation with the Principal, SEN co-ordinators, special education team, classroom teachers, SNA's, parents, pupils and the Board of Management of Merlin Woods Primary School. In Merlin Woods Primary School we value the individuality of all of our children. We are committed to giving all of our children every opportunity to achieve the highest of standards. We do this by taking account of pupils' varied life experiences and needs. We offer a broad and balanced curriculum and have high expectations for all children. The achievements, attitudes and well being of all our children matter. This policy helps to ensure that this school promotes the individuality of all our children, irrespective of ethnicity, attainment, age, ability, gender or background.

Rationale

This policy was drawn up in order to:

- Support children with identified special educational needs, including children whom English is an Additional Language.
- Ensure that children with the greatest level of needs should have access to the greatest level of support.
- Provide practical guidance for teachers, parents and other interested parties on the provision of effective special education teaching to children experiencing low achievement and/or learning difficulties.
- Ensure that children with special educational needs can participate in all activities in the school, where possible, ensuring an inclusive learning environment.

Legal Framework

This policy is drafted in the context of the specific provisions and definitions with regard to children with disabilities and additional educational needs, the statutory requirements placed on schools and Boards of Managements by:

- The Education Act 1998
 - The Education (Welfare) Act 2000
 - The Equal Status Act (2000) and Equality Act (2004)
 - The Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004
 - The Data Protection Acts (1988, 199 and 2003) and Freedom of Education Acts (1997 and 2003)
 - Children First Act 2015
 - GDPR 2018
- and relevant Circular Letters from the Department of Education and Skills.

Aims

This policy aims to:

- Remove barriers for students to ensure that all students have equitable access to school life and the curriculum
- Outline our procedures and practices to be followed in relation to children with special educational needs.
- Allocate resources to effectively meet the needs of children with additional needs.
- Work in partnership with parents in supporting their children's learning.
- Promote co-operation and communication between class teachers, Special Education Teachers, SNA's, parents and pupils where appropriate in the implementation of the SEN programme.

- Develop positive self-esteem and positive attitudes about school and learning in children.
- Encourage children to monitor their own learning and strive towards independence.
-
- Provide, as far as is practicable and having regard to the resources available, a level and quality of holistic education appropriate to the needs and abilities of all students in the school, in order that they may achieve to their potential
- Ensure that all our students leave school as active, responsible citizens with the life skills that they need to participate in society and to live independent and fulfilled lives as far as possible
- Enable all students to belong to an educational community without prejudice and within which individual difference is celebrated
- To develop the necessary systems, structures and staff expertise in supporting students with additional educational needs

Inclusion

We are fully committed to the principle of inclusion and the good practice which makes it possible. Our policy as set out in this document, aims to enable all children, including those with SEN, those with English as an additional language, those who come from different ethnicities or cultures and those who are exceptionally able, to become fully integrated members of our school community. We aim to achieve this by:

1. Creating an Inclusive Culture

- Everyone in our school Community is made to feel welcome and greeted kindly when entering the classroom.
- Students help each other and classrooms have a collaborative culture.
- Staff and students treat one another with respect.
- There is an effective partnership between staff and parents.
- Staff have high expectations of all students.
- Staff, BOM, students, and parents share a philosophy of inclusion.
- Students are equally valued in our school.
- Staff seek to remove barriers to learning and participation in all aspects of the school.
- The school strives to minimise all forms of discrimination

2. Producing Inclusive Policies

- Our school buildings are physically accessible to all people.
- New students and staff are helped to settle into the school.

- Support for students with SEN is coordinated by SENCO.
- Staff are given opportunities to participate in professional development that will support teaching of students with SEN.
- School policies are inclusive policies.
- Staff are aware of their responsibilities under current legislation in relation to the education of students with SEN.
- Barriers to attendance are minimised.
- Anti-Bullying strategies are pro-active and well promoted throughout the school

3. Evolving and promoting inclusive Practices

- Teaching is planned with the learning of all students in mind.
- Students with SEN/EAL are actively encouraged to participate in lessons.
- Students are actively involved in their own learning, e.g. self-assessment strategies such as KWL, Seesaw, setting their own learning goals etc.
- Students learn collaboratively where possible.
 - Use a variety of teaching styles including scaffolding, modeling, peer tutoring, active learning, and co-operative group work.
- Teachers use the Universal Design for Learning guidelines (UDL) when planning and offer choice to pupils when planning lessons.
- Teachers use a variety of alternatives for recording what is being learned through choice boards e.g. writing, voice recording, drama, use of ICT, discussion and feedback.
- Teachers plan, teach and review in partnership where appropriate e.g. team teaching, collaboration with the special education teacher. Time for collaboration is supported by school leadership.

Roles and Responsibilities

Principal

The *Learning Support Guidelines (2000, P.39)* outlines the principal has overall responsibility for SEN procedures and practices in the school. The new allocation model states the principal's leadership role is central and includes the following;

The school principal should:

- Implement and monitor the school's Special Educational Needs policy on an on-going basis.
- Assign staff strategically to teaching roles, including special education roles.
- Co-ordinate teachers' work to ensure continuity of provision for all pupils.

- Ensure that whole-school procedures are established to facilitate the effective involvement of parents, pupils and external professionals/agencies.
- Ensure that effective systems are implemented to identify pupils' needs and that progress is monitored methodically.
- Provide information on continuing professional development in the area of special education. Facilitate the continuing professional development of all teachers in relation to education of pupils with special educational needs.
- Ensure that all school staff (class teachers, special education teachers and special needs assistants) are clear regarding their roles and responsibilities in this area.
- Assign responsibility for co-ordinating additional support to an identified teacher (i.e. SEN co-ordinator).
- Communicate regularly with the SEN co-ordinator.
- Oversee the implementation of a whole school assessment and screening programme to identify children with very low achievement and/or learning difficulties.
- Have primary role in the decision making for applications for allocated NEPS psychological assessments.
- Oversee the review of each pupil's placement in the ASD unit annually.
- Allocate time within the school timetable for the SET team to plan and consult with teachers and parents.
- Inform staff about external agencies.

SEN Co-ordinator

SEN co-ordinator (SENCO) should:

- Communicate with the principal in relation to SEN matters on an on-going basis.
- Liaise with external agencies about the provision for pupils with additional needs.
- Liaise with the NEPS psychologist, the SET team and class teachers to prioritise children for psychological assessments (NEPS).
- Co-ordinate SET team meetings to ensure effective communication and support for children with additional needs.
- Maintain a record of these meetings and decisions made.
- Collaborate with the SET team in creating timetables for additional support.
- Create and implement a whole school timetable for in-class interventions.
- Create and update yearly assessment calendar and circulate to all staff. Co-ordinate the carrying out of these assessments.

- Maintain records of pupils who are receiving additional support and update twice yearly.
- Co-ordinate and assist staff on the creation of student support files, reviewed twice yearly.
- Co-ordinate the screening of pupils for additional support, using the results of standardised tests.
- Select children for external diagnostic assessment, where parental permission has been sought and granted.
- Meet with class teachers to discuss and review the needs of the pupils in their class.
- Advise class teachers on procedures for availing of external special needs services.
- When required, meet with parents to advise them on procedures for availing of special needs services.
- Update and maintain class SEN records and test results.
- Ensure procurement of assistive technology devices.
- Meet with parents who are seeking an Irish exemption for their child.

Class Teacher

Class teachers have primary responsibility for the teaching and learning of all pupils in his/her class, including any pupil with a special educational need. The class teacher has primary responsibility for the progress and care of all pupils in his/her classroom, including pupils with special educational needs (section 22(1) Education Act 1998).

They should:

- Ensure that each pupil is taught in a stimulating and supportive classroom environment where all pupils feel equal and valued.
- Implement teaching programmes which optimise the learning of all pupils eg. low threshold high ceiling tasks and facilitate meaningful inclusion of children with special educational needs.
- Differentiate teaching strategies, approaches and expectations to the range of experiences, abilities, needs and learning styles in their class.
- Administer and correct standardised tests of achievement in literacy and numeracy, following the school's guidelines.
- Discuss outcomes of standardised testing with assigned SET to assist in the selection of children for supplementary teaching.
- Meet with parents regarding any concerns about their child and update them regarding their progress.
- Gather information and assess children presenting with needs to inform teaching and learning using the Continuum of Support.

- Open a Pupil Support File once additional needs have been identified and require classroom support. Review targets/learning goals on an ongoing basis.
- Meet with Special Education Teachers, parents and other relevant staff members to identify priority learning goals for each pupil in receipt of School Support and school support Plus.
- Collaborate with assigned Special Education Teacher to develop a student support file for each pupil in receipt of School Support and School Support Plus and review regularly.
- Engage with the teacher from the special class (if applicable) to discuss the needs of the child from the Autism class and plan for meaningful inclusion of the child into the mainstream class. Both teachers should meet to review progress regularly.
- Collaborate with the SET team regularly to co-ordinate planning lessons for team-teaching.
- Adjust the class timetable to ensure that children in receipt of supplementary teaching will not be absent for the same subject/activity during each session.
- Co-ordinate the responsibilities of the SNA (if applicable) in relation to the needs of pupils with SEN within the class to which they are assigned.
- Meet and liaise with outside agencies as required

Special Education Teacher (SET)

The SET teacher should:

- Familiarise themselves with a wide range of teaching approaches, methodologies and resources to cater for particular learning styles and to meet a variety of need.
- Assist in the implementation of a broad range of whole school strategies aimed at early intervention, literacy, numeracy and social emotional teaching.
- Develop student support files for each pupil selected for school support and school support plus teaching in collaboration with class teachers.
- Meet with class teachers and parents to identify priority learning goals for each pupil in receipt of School Support and School Support Plus and who require a student support file.
- Meet with parents regarding any concerns about their child and update them regarding their progress.
- Meet three times a year with class teachers, relevant staff and parents to review student support files (Oct, Feb, June).
- Update and maintain planning and progress records for each individual or group of pupils in receipt of school support/school support plus.
- Provide supplementary teaching for literacy and numeracy with a combination of in-class support (team-teaching), small group support and individual support.

- Support whole-school procedures for screening.
- Administer and interpret diagnostic tests and inform class teachers and parents of the outcomes.
- Co-ordinate class groups and offer advice and support to class teachers regarding pupils on their caseload.
- Discuss the needs and progress of children on their caseload at planning meetings.
- If a pupil with special educational needs is moving school, provide necessary information to the new school once a transfer letter has been received.

The SET works in partnership with class teachers in the classrooms as much as possible. This involves supporting individual children or small groups of children and, at times, teaching the whole class while the class teacher works with small groups or individuals. Sometimes the SET works with groups of children, of whom only one or two may be in need of extra support.

Special Needs Assistants

SNAs may be appointed to meet care needs of students with additional needs who have, for example, a significant medical need for assistance or a significant impairment of physical or sensory function, or on behalf of students whose behaviour is such that they are a danger to themselves or to other students. Merlin Woods Primary School recognises the valuable contribution SNA's make to the school's capacity to provide inclusive education to these students.

The care support tasks may include:

- Administration of medicine as per child's care plan.
- Assistance with toileting and general hygiene.
- Assistance with mobility and orientation.
- Assisting teachers to provide supervision in the class, playground and school grounds, and at recreation, assembly and dispersal times.
- Assisting children while at play as appropriate.
- Provision of non-nursing care needs associated with specific medical conditions.
- Care needs requiring frequent interventions including withdrawal of a child from a classroom when essential.
- Assistance with moving and lifting of children, operation of hoists and equipment.
- Assistance with severe communication difficulties including enabling curriculum access for children with physical disabilities or sensory needs and those with significant, and identified social and emotional difficulties. The secondary care support tasks may include:
 - Preparation and tidying of workspaces and classrooms or assisting a child who is not physically able to perform such tasks; to prepare and tidy a workspace, to present materials, to display work, or to transition from one lesson activity to another.
 - Assistance with the development of a care plan (formerly known as PPP) for children with Special Educational Needs, with a particular focus on developing a care plan to meet the care needs of the child concerned and the review of such plans.

- Planning for activities and classes where there may be additional care requirements associated with particular activities.
- Attending meetings with Parents, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENO); National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS); or school staff meetings with the agreement and guidance of Class Teacher/Principal.
- Assistance with enabling a child to access therapy or psycho-educational programmes such as anger management or social skills classes, under the direction of appropriate personnel.
- Assistance to attend or participate in out of school activities: walks, or visits, where such assistance cannot be provided by teaching staff.

Parents/Guardians:

Collaboration and sharing of relevant information between home and school are essential elements of our SEN policy. Parents/Guardians through their unique knowledge of their own children have much to contribute to their child's learning.

Parent/Guardian should:

- Share any information, reports or reports pending from health professionals, and/or concerns regarding their child's development. Copies of professional reports should be provided to the school at the enrollment stage.
- Communicate regularly with the class teacher and SET and attend meetings to review progress, raise concerns, and review continuum of support files.
- Collaborate in identifying and responding to the needs of their child, setting school and home targets in the student support file.
- Support the work of the school and keep the class teacher informed of the progress and challenges they observe in their child's learning.
- Support the targets outlined in their child's support plans and engage in all suggested home-based activities, where possible.

Pupils:

Pupils who have a student support file should, as appropriate:

- Be given the opportunity to contribute to the setting of the medium and short-term learning targets.
- Become familiar with the targets that have been set for them.
- Develop 'ownership' of the skills and strategies that are taught during supplementary teaching and learn to apply these learning strategies and skills to improve their own learning.
- Contribute to the evaluation of their progress by participating in appropriate assessment activities, including self-assessment.

Board of Management:

The BOM oversees the development, implementation and review of the school's Special Educational Needs policy. They also ensure that adequate classroom accommodation, secure storage space and that effective teaching resources are provided.

Enrolment of Children with Special Educational Needs**Enrolment in a Mainstream Class**

Application for enrolment for all children is governed at all times by the school's Admission Policy. Every parent must fill out an expression of interest form for their child. Once a child is formally offered a place in Merlin Woods Primary School, parents are asked to complete an enrolment form. On this form parents are asked if their child has an identified special need and details of assessments the child may have had in order to provide the necessary support to assist the child. No child will be discriminated against due to a Special Educational Need. If a child has an identified special need and is already receiving support from an agency/organisation, it is the responsibility of the parents to notify the school. The S.E.N.O is contacted at the earliest opportunity if an application is needed for S.N.A assistance for the child. The Principal, S.E.N co-ordinator and class teacher will read all current reports received on the child prior to the child starting school.

The class teacher will facilitate inclusion of children with additional needs in all aspects of the curriculum. Relevant school personnel will be made aware of the special educational needs of the child and the strategies necessary to integrate them in all aspects of school life.

Enrolment in the Autism Class

In 2011, Merlin Woods Primary School opened a special class for children with a diagnosis of Autistic. In 2014, a second Autism class was opened. Our Autism classes offer an Autistic specific learning environment within a mainstream co-educational primary school. The setting facilitates optimum inclusion in mainstream education as part of the school community as appropriate, with regard to the levels of general learning ability, resources and suitability for inclusion. The maximum enrolment in each class is 6 children, in line with Department regulations, in order to allow for intensive educational and individual programmes suited to each child's needs. In order to enrol a child in the Autism class, parents must fill out an expression of interest form and provide a letter of eligibility from the NCSE for the Autism class. Written reports are requested upon offer of a place and an enrolment form must be completed.

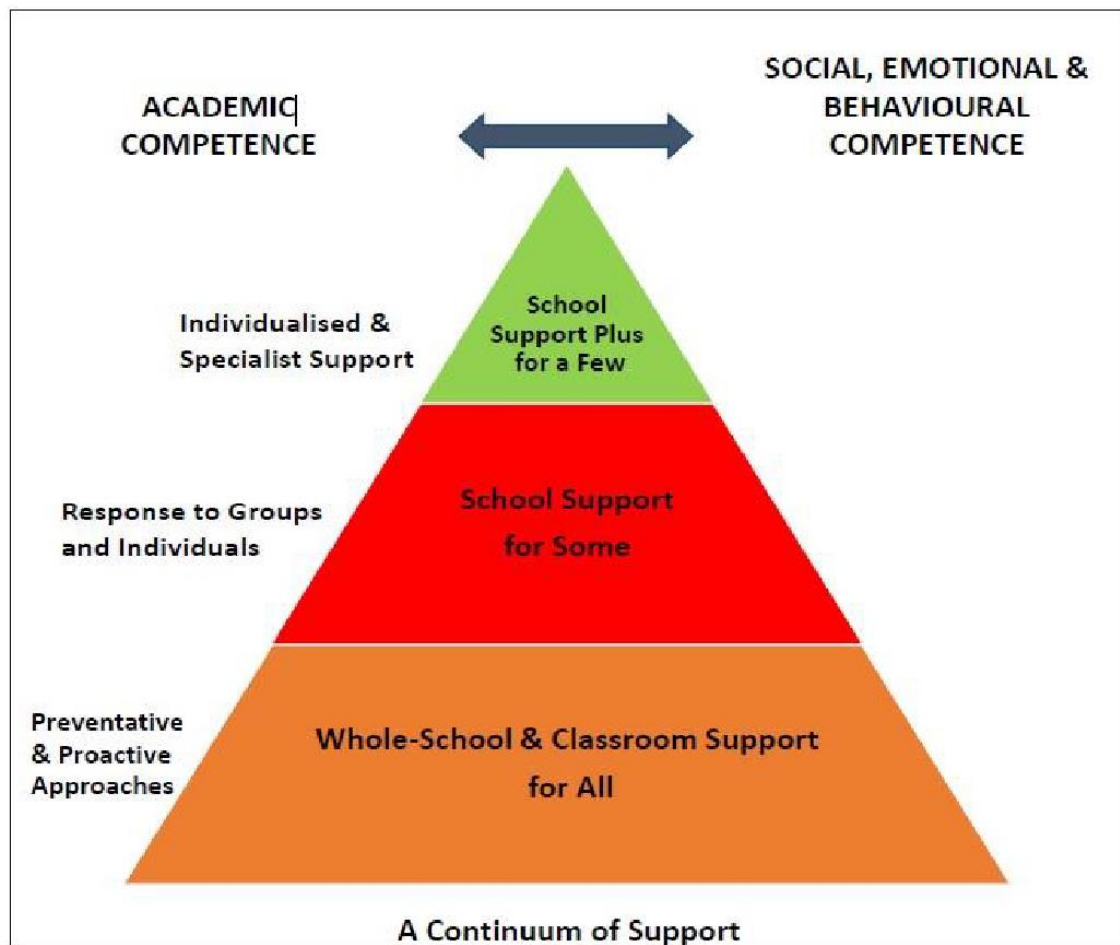
For further details please see Merlin Woods Admissions Policy.

Identifying Children with Special Educational Needs

The Continuum of Support

In Merlin Woods Primary School, we adopt the Continuum of Support Framework set out by the Department of Education, to identify and support children with additional needs. We recognise that special educational needs occur along a continuum, ranging from mild to severe, and from transient to long-term and that children require different levels of support depending on their identified additional needs. By using this framework, it helps us implement a staged approach to ensure that our support and interventions are incremental, moving from class-based interventions to more intensive and individualised support, and are informed by careful monitoring of progress.

The Continuum of Support is a problem-solving model of assessment and intervention that enables us to gather and analyse data, as well as to plan and review the progress of individual children. Identification of educational needs is central to our policy and the new allocation model. By using the Continuum of Support framework, we can identify children's educational needs, to include academic, social and emotional needs, as well as needs associated with physical, sensory, language and communication difficulties. This, in turn, allows us to identify and respond to needs in a flexible way. We aim to respond to individual children's needs as early as possible and follow the principle that children with the **greatest level of need have access to the greatest level of support.**



Stage 1: Classroom Support

The needs of the majority of pupils within a mainstream class can be met by differentiation. A classroom support plan is opened when the teacher considers that their concerns cannot be met through whole class teaching approaches and differentiation.

Classroom Support is typically the first response to emerging needs. A classroom support plan is required for children who have a distinct or individual educational needs that require approaches to learning and/or behaviour which are **additional to or different** from those required by other children in the class. A classroom support plan is developed and /or adjusted over time for those children who do not respond appropriately to the differentiated programme.

This is informed by:

- Parental consultation
- Teacher observation records
- Teacher-designed assessments
- Basic needs checklists
- Learning environment checklist

- Literacy and numeracy assessments
- Screening tests
(The above are used as required)

The class teacher has responsibility for interventions at this level. The support plan runs for an agreed period of time and is subject to review at regular intervals eg. 6 - 12 weeks /termly.

Stage 2: School Support

An assessment and intervention process which is usually co-ordinated by the Special Education Teacher working alongside the Class Teacher. Interventions at this stage will be additional to those provided through classroom support.

In some cases, interventions at classroom support level are not enough to fully meet the child's needs. Therefore, school support may be required. The decision to initiate a School Support Plan is usually taken as a result of the review of the Classroom Support Plan. The classroom teacher involves the special education teacher in the problem- solving process at this point and it involves more systematic gathering of information and the development and monitoring of a School Support Plan.

At this level a School Support Plan is devised and informed by:

- Review of the Classroom Support Plan
- Teacher observation records
- Teacher –designed assessments
- Meeting with parent
- Learning environment checklist
- Diagnostic assessments in literacy/numeracy
- Formal observation of behaviour including ABC charts, frequency measures
(The above are used as required)
- Functional assessment as appropriate, including screening measure for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties

Stage 3: School Support Plus

Intervention for children with more complex and/or persistent difficulties or whose progress is considered inadequate, despite carefully planned interventions at the previous levels. The school may seek the involvement of relevant external professionals and support services at this stage in order to carry out more detailed assessments and to develop intervention programmes.

This level of continuum is informed by a detailed, systematic approach to information gathering and assessment using a broad range of formal and informal assessment tools, reports from outside professionals(as appropriate) and may include:

- Teacher observation and teacher-designed measures
- Parent and child interviews
- Functional assessment
- Results of standardised testing such as measures of cognitive ability; social, emotional and behavioural functioning; adaptive functioning etc.

Data generated from this process are then used to plan an appropriate intervention and can serve as a baseline against which to map progress.

A support plan at this level is likely to be more detailed and individualised, and to include longer term planning and consultation.

Exceptions

While most childrens' initial needs should be met through classroom based interventions, a small number of children may arrive at school with difficulties that are more significant or which are immediately recognised. In such cases, it may be more appropriate to begin with a School Support or School Support Plus Plan. Most of the children to whom this applies will be new to the school. However it may also apply for some children following an event which impacts significantly on them in school.

Information Gathering and Assessment

Class teachers carry out assessments on a regular basis for all children in their class. Some methods of assessment include self-assessment, questioning, teacher observation, portfolios of work and teacher-designed tasks and tests. The information gathered enables the teacher to plan learning experiences based on the appropriate objectives of the curriculum.

In order to identify children who may require supplementary teaching, screening tests including standardised testing is carried out in all classes and further diagnostic testing may need to take place. The information gathered from these formal assessments is then used to inform decisions for support and children's support plans.

Assessment and Screening Test Procedures

In Merlin Woods Primary School we carry out the following assessment procedures:

- Junior Infants: Observation, checklists, B.I.A.P (Bellfield Infant Assessment Profile) for children of concern.
- Senior Infants: Observation, checklists, Reading Miscue Analysis, M.I.S.T (Middle Infant screening test), Reading Recovery assessments(selected children)

- 1st Class: Observation, checklists, Reading Miscue Analysis, Drumcondra literacy and numeracy, Reading Recovery assessments (selected children)
- 2nd Class: Observation, checklists, Reading Miscue Analysis, Drumcondra literacy and numeracy, Reading Recovery assessments (selected children)
- 2nd Class: Observation, checklists, Reading Miscue Analysis, Drumcondra literacy and numeracy, N.R.I.T (non-Reading intelligence test)
- 3rd Class: Observation, checklists, Reading Miscue Analysis, Sigma T, Micra T, Dyslexia Screening (on selected children).
- 4th Class: Observation, checklists, Sigma T, Micra T, Dyslexia Screening (on selected children).
- 5th class: Observation, checklists, Sigma T, Micra T, Dyslexia Screening (on selected children).
- 6th Class: Observation, checklists, Sigma T, Micra T, Dyslexia Screening (on selected children).

We also carry out the NRIT with children of concern, if they are new to the school and were not tested in 2nd class.

We continually review the assessment and screening tests that we use in order to balance the needs of our children and the need to provide information for appropriate support. Therefore we may deviate from the above list prior to the review date.

Diagnostic & Screening Assessments Inventory

In our school we use the following tests depending on individual needs and class level:

- Jackson phonics assessments
- B.I.A.P
- Teacher Observations in ready set go maths
- Math my Way assessments
- M.I.S.T
- PM Reading Miscue analysis (Running Records)
- YARK Assessment of Reading for Comprehension
- ACE Assessment of Comprehension
- British Ability Scales (Reading Recovery only)
- PHAB test (non-word reading test)
- The Dyslexia Screening Test (Pearson)
- Schonell Reading test
- Schonell Spelling test

- PM Sight word checklists
- Writing vocabulary observation assessment
- Hearing and recording sounds in words (dictation)
- N.R.I.T (Non-Reading Intelligence Test)
- N.V.R.T(Non-Verbal Reasoning Test)
- Drumcondra Literacy and numeracy
- Primary School Assessment Kit.

Student Support File

Rationale for the use of the Student Support File:

- The Student Support File allows the school to track the child’s pathway through the Continuum of Support, right from the start of the support process, and onwards, if necessary, through to the School Support (for some) and School Support Plus (for a few) levels.
- The Student Support File allows the school to document progress and needs over time.
- The Student Support File ensures continuity of support for a child, including transition from primary to post-primary school.
- The Student Support File encourages parental collaboration and parental engagement in their child’s learning.
- The Student Support File assists schools in providing an appropriate level of support to children, in line with their level of need.
- The Student Support File keeps together all the information about the support of the student: information gathered, plans and interventions, consultations and reviews.
- The Student Support File is a confidential working document, stored on the school’s shared storage.

Contents of Student Support Files

The Student Support File used in Merlin Woods is based on the NEPS recommended template. All student support files must include:

- Cover page with child’s details
- Log of actions and meetings
- General support checklist
- Child’s information – including D.O.B, address, parent’s names, attendance, outside agency details.
- Assessment information

- Child's strengths and attainments
- Priority concerns
- Priority learning targets
- Review Record
- Parent's signature following initial meeting to agree targets and review meeting.

All Student Support Files are to be stored securely on the school's shared storage system. Any hard copies of files must be stored in a locked cabinet in support rooms. At the end of the school year completed continuum files on each child must be printed and stored in the school office in the children's files. It is the responsibility of the SET and class teacher of the relevant children to update and manage these files.

Classroom Support File

Classroom support is the most common and typically the first response to emerging needs. The starting point for the Classroom Support process is when a teacher and parent share concerns regarding a student's learning and/or social development in school.

At this point some simple classroom interventions will have already been tried - such as differentiation, adjustments to the learning environment and/or adjustments to teaching style. Concerns, however, will have remained about:

- The child's skills and/or behaviour that appear to be falling below the typical range for his/her age and appear to be impacting on his/her learning and/or socialisation.
- The child's response to the simple classroom interventions that have been already tried.

These concerns will have suggested that this child has distinct and individual needs that will require a Classroom Support Plan.

The next steps to develop a Classroom Support Plan include:

- Student Support File is opened by the class teacher.
- Concerns **are recorded**, as well as the child's strengths and interests. This step in the process may be informed by the data gathered when completing some/all of the Support Checklist.
- Ideas are discussed with regard to **strategies/interventions** to address the child's needs within the classroom.
- A Support Plan is drawn up with 3-4 targets and signed by the class teacher and parent(s)/guardian(s) and implemented for an agreed time span. The plan is reviewed on an on-going basis
- Targets are reviewed at **minimum every 6 weeks**.

The Classroom Support Plan, together with the priority learning targets, review document, checklists used, log of actions (such as a record of consultation with the NEPS psychologist) will be kept within the students support file, allowing the school to track the child's progress and needs over time.

School Support File

While most children's initial needs will be met through classroom based interventions, in some cases interventions at Classroom Support level are not sufficient to fully meet their educational needs. A School Support Plan may be needed. The decision to initiate a School Support Plan is usually taken as a result of the review of a Classroom Support Plan, by the class teacher and parent.

Steps in developing a Support Plan:

- The class teacher is required to involve the assigned SET in the problem-solving process at this point.
- The class teacher, parent and assigned SET share and record ongoing concerns regarding the child's progress in school, as well as noting his/her strengths and interests.
- The School Support Plan will be informed by a more systematic gathering of information about the student, which may include diagnostic assessment and observation of the student's learning and/or behavioural/emotional/social skills.
- This step in the process may be informed by data gathered when completing the Support Checklist.
- The School Support Plan is co-ordinated by the assigned SET.
- The School Support Plan is drawn up in collaboration with the class teacher, SET and parent and implemented for an agreed time span.
- Targets are reviewed twice per year (minimum) and the review record is completed.
- Parents are invited to attend review meetings in February and June, or other times depending on when the file was opened.

The School Support Plan, including priority learning targets, reviews, checklists used and log of actions (such as a record of consultation with the NEPS psychologist), will be kept within the Student Support File. This allows the school to continue to track the child's progress and needs over time.

School Support Plus File

The School Support Plus process will be initiated if, in reviewing the Support Plan, it is agreed that the child is not making adequate progress, despite purposeful efforts. This process will generally involve external professionals and support services in a more detailed problem solving process.

It is expected that the students who are receiving support at the level of School Support Plus, will be those with greatest need. Students needing support at this level will have their needs and interventions detailed and monitored in a School Support Plus Plan.

- The School Support Plus Plan is co-ordinated by the assigned SET.
- A review of work already done at the levels of Classroom Support and School Support, and contained within the Student Support File, will provide important information for this School Support Plus Plan.
- The School Support Plus Plan, together with reports from other professionals, consultation records and other relevant documents, will add to the body of information that is already contained within the Student Support File – allowing the school to continue to track the child’s progress and needs over time.
- The School Support Plus Plan is drawn up in collaboration with classroom teachers, SET and parents, relevant professionals (as applicable), and implemented for an agreed time span.
- School Support Plus targets are reviewed twice per year (minimum) and a copy of the target Review Record is shared with parents.
- Parents are invited to attend review meetings in February and June, or other times depending on when the file was opened.

Parental Engagement

Good parental engagement is a critical element in enhancing outcomes for children with special educational needs. This is recognised by Merlin Woods Primary School and is seen in the many good practices and initiatives we use to promote parental involvement such as:

- Parents of incoming Junior Infant children are invited to attend an induction meeting prior to children starting Junior Infants. Details about the school, attendance, curriculum and programmes carried out in Junior Infants are discussed at this meeting.
- Parents are invited to attend a presentation presented by all class teachers in September, outlining the content of the curriculum, programmes that will be used in the class and attendance.
- All Parent- Teacher meetings are held in November each year.
- Parents are invited to assist in Maths Week activities, Summer celebration, school Disco’s and fundraising events.
- Parents are encouraged to attend courses/presentations held within the school such as online safety talks, Stay Safe talks and are informed of courses held in the locality.
- Parents can arrange meetings with teachers by ringing or calling to the secretary’s office.
- Parents collaborate with the Class Teacher or Special Education Teacher through the continuum of support process. Teachers engage with parents to identify and

respond to the needs of their child. Teachers consult with parents when developing and reviewing targets for their child. A home target is always included in all stages of the continuum. Parents are invited for meetings with the class teacher or special education teacher in October, February and June. If a Student Support File is opened for a child during the year, dates above may differ. Parents of children on classroom support may be consulted more frequently as targets set are reviewed more regularly.

Pupil Engagement

Good engagement and participation in their own education has many associated benefits for children. This is particularly important for children with special educational needs and can help enhance their academic and social and emotional outcomes.

In Merlin Woods Primary School we endeavour to engage children in the continuum of support model by:

- Including children in a shared assessment for the learning process (E.g. Children self-assess and evaluate their learning targets when appropriate).
- Observation and assessment of children's interests, aspirations and strengths, for example, through use of "My thoughts about School" questionnaire and inclusion of children's interests in designing educational or behavioural programmes.
- Setting shared learning objectives, where possible.
- Jointly reviewing progress, where possible.

Engagement with External Bodies and Agencies

The school may engage with external bodies and agencies if, after support file review, relevant parties have identified more significant and enduring needs, whereby children would benefit from a multi-disciplinary approach to identification of needs and the development of interventions.

In such cases, the following actions will be carried out:

- The child has an open School Support File, whereby the school has supported the child at relevant levels for a period of at least 12 weeks.
- If a child comes to the school and is linked to an external agency, a School Support File is opened straight away.
- The SET and class teacher will meet with the parents to discuss the child's progress and concerns.
- Through discussion, the need for referral may be addressed.
- Parents/Guardians can complete a referral independently.
- If agreeable by all parties, class teacher, SET and parents can collaboratively complete the referral.

- The relevant SET and SEN co-ordinator co-ordinate the referral of children to outside agencies at parents' request e.g. SENO, NEPS, Speech and Language therapist, occupational therapist, Educational psychologist, AON Officer, HSE, CAMHs.
- Merlin Woods Primary School promotes an inclusive model of support whereby the relevant support professionals are invited to visit and/or liaise with the school.
- Recommendations will be considered and appropriate planning will take place to address the needs of the child.
- Transition programmes will be put in place for a child on the continuum of support who is transferring to secondary school/another school.

Guiding Principles in Implementing the Revised Model for Allocating SEN supports

- Resources provided to support pupils with special educational needs should be used to facilitate the development of truly inclusive schools.
- Support provided to pupils with special educational needs should be based on identified needs and be informed by regular reviews of progress as outlined in the Continuum of Support Guidelines.
- The class teacher has primary responsibility for the progress and care of all pupils in the classroom, including pupils with special educational needs.
- Special education teaching support provided to schools should be solely used for the support of pupils with identified special needs, including those pupils for whom English is an Additional language. The special education teaching cannot be used to reduce the pupil-teacher ratio in mainstream classes or for an SET to take sole responsibility for the delivery of any curriculum subjects to any particular class.
- Pupils with the greatest level of need should have access to the greatest level of support, and wherever possible, these pupils should be supported by teachers with relevant expertise who can provide continuity of support.

Meeting the Needs and Allocating Resources

Once children's needs have been identified, Special Education Teachers (SETs) are deployed to address these needs as required. We deploy SETs in a variety of ways in order to effectively meet children's needs. We aim to strike a balance between in-class support, group and individual support while ensuring that the needs of children with special educational needs are met inclusively.

Importantly, the level and type of support reflect the specific targets of individual children as set out in their support plans and are informed by careful monitoring and review of progress. In this way, following a period of intervention, some children may no longer require additional teaching support; some may require the same level, while others may require more intensive support.

In planning the allocation of additional teaching supports, the over-riding principle is that resources are deployed to address the identified needs of children. Importantly, those with **the highest level of need should have access to the greatest level of support**. We consider methodologies best suited to promoting meaningful inclusion such as differentiation, team-teaching and small group teaching. In addition to literacy and numeracy difficulties, many children will have specific needs in such areas as oral language, social interaction, behaviour, emotional development, motor skills and application to learning. Where possible resources will be available to support the progression of high achieving children. The National University of Ireland, Galway runs a youth academy for children who score in the 95th percentile or above in standardised tests. Parents of all children who qualify for this programme are informed and encouraged to enrol their child.

The special education teachers meet class teachers initially in October, and then in February and June to review children's needs, the resources in place and progress made using the Continuum of Support problem-solving model of assessment.

Allocating Resources for Additional Teaching Support

When allocating resources for additional support priority is given to the following:

- Children who are identified as having significant needs through a process of ongoing assessment and intervention as set out in the Continuum of Support Process (DES, 2010). This will be evidenced through school-based assessment of attainment, behavioural, social and emotional functioning and needs set out in professional reports and ongoing monitoring of learning outcomes.
- Children with significant special educational needs, for example, children with significant learning, behavioural, emotional, physical and sensory needs.
- Children with mild or transient educational needs including those associated with speech and language difficulties, social or emotional problems, coordination, attention control difficulties and specific learning disabilities.
- Children who have additional literacy or language learning needs including those children who need additional English Additional language Support.
- Children who were previously in receipt of supplementary teaching from a resource or learning support teacher and who continue to experience significant learning difficulties will be supported.
- Children who were previously on stage 1 or 2 of the continuum but have not made appropriate progress.
- Priority for special education teaching is given to those children who perform at or below the 15th percentile on standardised tests in reading and maths through consultation between the class teacher and SET. Children are also selected based on their performance in MIST (Middle Infant Screening Test), PM reading miscue

analysis, PM sight word checklists, Jackson Phonics assessments, Schonell word reading and spelling, N.R.I.T, classroom based assessments or 96th and above.

Effective Teaching and Learning:

The role of Class Teacher and Special Education Teacher

Class Teacher

Effective teaching and learning is of vital importance for all children, and especially for those with special educational needs. Meaningful inclusion implies that all children are taught in stimulating and supportive classroom environments where they are respected and valued. Mainstream class teachers have **first-line responsibility** for the education of all children in their class. Accordingly, classroom teachers should ensure that they plan their lessons carefully to address the diverse needs within the classroom. They may need to adapt their teaching approaches for some children whose individual progress, application, motivation, communication, behaviour or interaction with peers are causes for concern. This may require targeted interventions to develop relevant adaptive skills related to these needs. All mainstream class teachers should implement teaching approaches and methodologies that facilitate the meaningful inclusion of children with special educational needs. These include:

- Co-operative teaching and learning within mainstream classrooms
- Collaborative problem-solving activities
- Active learning
- Small group tuition
- Scaffolded instruction
- Differentiated tasks (see below)
- Interventions to promote social and emotional competence, e.g. taught and modelled group roles
- Embedding Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in teaching, learning and assessment

To cater for the range of learning needs in any class, mainstream class teachers will regularly need to differentiate their lessons. This can be achieved by:

- Varying the level, structure, mode of instruction and pace of lessons to meet individual needs
- Adapting lessons to take account of children's interests
- Matching tasks to children's abilities and needs
- Adapting and utilising resources, including the use of technology
- Aspiring towards suitably challenging learning outcomes and assessing accordingly

Special Education Teacher

Special Education Teachers should be familiar with a wide range of teaching approaches, methodologies and resources to cater for particular learning styles and to meet a variety of needs. Teaching approaches will include a combination of team-teaching initiatives, co-operative teaching, early intervention and small group or individual support. Depending on the learning needs identified, a child with special educational needs may be supported at classroom level, with additional teaching delivered through in-class or withdrawal support models.

Some children with more complex needs may require specific methodologies, teaching approaches and/or learning activities. Such interventions should be based on careful identification of strengths and needs, including multi-disciplinary assessment, when necessary.

Special education teachers, in consultation with class teachers, should plan their interventions carefully to address each child's priority learning needs and to achieve the targets identified in the relevant Continuum of Support plan. Short-term planning should reflect the Support Plan targets and should break down the development of skills and content into small incremental steps to address each child's specific needs on a weekly basis. Outcomes should be routinely assessed, recorded and used to review progress. These outcomes should also be used to inform the targets for the next phase of intervention.

Target Setting

Where a child is in receipt of support through the Continuum of Support Model, the class teacher and SET must collaborate in developing learning targets for the child and record these targets in the student Support File.

- There should be approximately 4 learning targets.
- There should be one home target.
- Targets must be specific- SMART (Specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timed).
- Targets should be discussed with parents at meeting and progress reviewed.
- Targets should be identifiable in short term planning.
- Targets should be evident in everyday classroom life of the child.

Timetabling

The SEN co-ordinator has overall responsibility for co-ordinating SET timetables. This involves:

- Analysing the level of additional needs at every class level.
- Using information from the SEN team, school continuum lists and standardised assessment results to assign Special Education Teachers to classes.

- Taking into account the level of need at each class level and the experience and qualifications of SET's.
- Each SET is attached to two classes at one class level or one class at two different class levels, depending on staff numbers and needs of each class. This will be reviewed every year.
- An SET may be assigned as an intervention teacher to assist with team-teaching stations.
- The SEN co-ordinator draws up a whole –school timetable of interventions (team-teaching) at each class level.
- Each SET is given a partially completed timetable with team-teaching sessions filled in. The SET is responsible for completing the timetable, ensuring that the children with the **great level of need receive the greatest level of support.**
- Timetables should be continually reviewed.
- Children should not miss the same subject each time they are withdrawn.
- If a child is unavailable for their lesson, the SET will attempt to reschedule the session with the co-operation of the class teacher.
- Interruptions to classes/classrooms should be kept to a minimum.

Provision of Early Intervention and Prevention Strategies

Merlin Woods is very aware of the evidence that early –intervention and prevention programmes can lead to improved outcomes for children. For that reason, the school deploys additional teaching resources to the junior classes to strengthen station teaching approaches which targets the promotion of language, literacy and numeracy skills. The use of these interventions helps mitigate the development of learning, social and emotional difficulties.

Our strategies include:

- Children from Junior Infants to second class are given priority in the allocation of additional support teaching.
- Classroom support for all for literacy and numeracy is provided by a number of support teachers who team-teach concurrently up to five times per week from Junior Infants to Second Class.
- Junior infants receive 2 sessions of literacy and 2 sessions of numeracy station teaching per week.
- In Senior Infants, Guided Reading is taught by a team of teachers twice per week throughout the year. Pre and Post -teaching assessments are carried out to monitor progress. The Ready, Set, Go maths programme is taught by a team of teachers in the form of station-teaching, twice per week.
- In First class, Guided Reading is taught by a team of teachers twice per week throughout the year. Pre and Post-teaching assessments are carried out to monitor

progress. The Maths My Way programme is carried out by a team of teachers in the form of station teaching, twice per week.

- In Second class, reading groups and maths station teaching are carried out throughout the year, each receiving two sessions per week.
- The Dina School programme is taught by two support teachers in Junior and Senior Infants. In-class support for play is provided in Junior and Senior Infants, where deemed necessary a support teacher is available.
- Provision of additional support in language development and any relevant early literacy skills to children who need it.
- The development and implementation of agreed whole school approaches to the teaching of literacy, e.g. phonics, reading, writing, oral language and comprehension strategies.
- The development and implementation of agreed whole school approaches to the teaching and language aspects of Maths.
- The development and implementation of agreed whole school approaches to the teaching and language of the Incredible Years Behaviour Management Programme, Dina School, Friends for Life and Weaving Wellbeing.
- On-going teacher observation and assessment of children.

Effective Whole School Policies

- The provision of special education teaching is planned to work in conjunction with the regular class teaching in literacy, numeracy, social and emotional literacy, physical, sensory and language communication difficulties.
- Whole school approaches are agreed in the areas of Phonics (Jolly Phonics), PM Guided Reading Programme, Comprehension Strategies (First Steps & Building Bridges of Understanding), Play, TSI (Transactional Strategies Instruction), First Steps Writing and Reading Resources, Ready Set Go Maths, Maths My Way, numeracy language, Incredible Years Behaviour Management Programme & Dina School and Friends for Life.
- The provision of special education teaching may include withdrawal of children from their classroom in a group, individual sessions and/or in-class tuition.
- In-class support will be jointly designed and monitored by the Class Teacher and the SET.
- In Junior Infants, two SET's are timetabled for Literacy and Numeracy Team-Teaching.
- In Senior Infants and First class, two SET's will be assigned to assist Numeracy Team-Teaching and 3/4 SET's to carry out the PM Guided Reading programme.
- In 2nd class, two SET's will be timetabled for Literacy and numeracy Team-Teaching.

- From 3rd- 6th, the assigned SET and the class teacher will work concurrently. The teachers will decide on the model of in-class support. Each class will receive two 'power hours' in the week which will be staffed by the class teacher and two SET's.

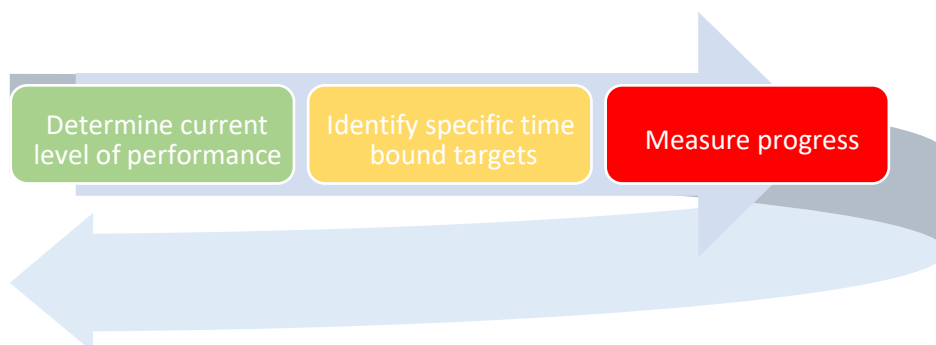
The level of staffing of interventions above will be reviewed annually. The number of teaching staff and class needs will be taken into account.

Monitoring and Reviewing Progress

The SEN co-ordinator will oversee a whole -school approach to monitoring, recording and reviewing progress. Assessment weeks are carried out in September, February and June and dates for this are outlined in the school's assessment calendar.

Monitoring outcomes is part of a dynamic process of:

1. Identification
2. Target-setting
3. Intervention
4. Review



The Student Review Record should be used to monitor progress and review outcomes. Review meetings with parents should be held in February and June. If a child is on classroom support, the classroom teacher will review targets and progress and meet with parents more frequently. Parents are asked to sign the review record. By following this process, subsequent support plans can be adapted and new targets set. Teachers can decide whether to keep a child on the same level of the continuum, move them up or down to another stage on the continuum, or close the student file if the child has made sufficient progress.

The School uses a whole school document to record all of the children who are in receipt of support through the continuum of support framework. This document is completed in October and updated in February. Each class completes their own document, keeping record of children in their class who are in receipt of support through the continuum of support framework. This document is also completed in October and reviewed in February. See Appendix 4 for template.

Irish Exemptions

If a pupil is to receive an exemption from Irish they must:

“present with significant learning difficulties that are persistent despite having had access to a differentiated approach to language and literacy learning in both Irish and English over time. Documentary evidence to this effect, held by the school, should include Student Support Plans detailing regular reviews of learning needs as part of an ongoing cycle of assessment, target-setting, evidence-informed intervention and review, including test scores (word reading, reading comprehension, spelling, other scores of language/literacy) at key points of review.”(pg 3, DES[b], 2019)

Please refer to Circular 0042/2019 for more information.

Merlin Woods Special Classes:

Merlin Woods has two Special classes that cater for children with a diagnosis of Autism. Our Autism classes offer an Autistic specific learning environment within a mainstream co-educational primary school. The setting facilitates optimum inclusion in mainstream education as part of the school community as appropriate, with regard to the levels of general learning disability, resources and suitability for inclusion. Reverse inclusion is also in practice in Merlin Woods. The maximum enrolment in each class is 6 children, in line with Department regulations, in order to allow for intensive educational and individual programmes suited to each child’s needs. Each class has 1 class teacher and 2 SNA’s. If circumstances arise where this level of support is not sufficient to meet the care needs of the cohort of pupils in the class, the school may apply to the SENO for access to additional care supports.

Staff Training/CPD

Special class teachers are encouraged to engage in appropriate learning opportunities to ensure that they have the knowledge, skills and competencies necessary to be a special class teacher. Ongoing specialist training is available through the *National Council for Special Education (NCSE)*. The school will ensure that Special Needs Assistants receive the training necessary to carry out tasks allocated to them.

Curriculum and School Support Planning

Children in the Autism class are given the opportunity to access the full range of curricular areas, in line with their abilities, either through differentiated teaching in special or mainstream classes.

Children in the Autism class need a detailed support plan, setting out clear goals and strategies to meet their diverse needs, in line with the NEPS Continuum of Support Guidelines. Support plans are based on a detailed assessment of individual needs. They include key independence and communication goals designed to facilitate their inclusion in mainstream classes to the greatest possible extent, and/or return to mainstream placement

where feasible. The teacher in the Autism class is responsible for the student support files of all of the children in the class.

Support plans address pupils' needs in some or all of the following areas, as appropriate to the pupil:

- Learning
- Social and communication
- Emotional
- Behaviour
- Life skills, including independence
- Care
- Adaptation of physical environment

Pupils' progress is kept under regular review.

A variety of methodologies will be used within the ASD class, that is, a range of teaching approaches (including those used in the school's mainstream classes) will be employed, based on the individual needs of the children. Some approaches that may be used include: the TEACCH programme, Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA), Lámh (manual signing system), Social Stories, Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), Intensive Interaction and Floor time.

Integration of pupils into Mainstream

Each child in the Autism class will be assigned to an age appropriate mainstream class for integration purposes. Class teachers and special class teachers arrange timetabling for integration into mainstream classes at the appropriate level for the child. The special class teacher is responsible for all planning for the children in the Autism class and is required to communicate with the mainstream class teacher in how best the children from the Autism class can access mainstream for aspects of their learning. Both teachers plan for meaningful inclusion of the child in the mainstream class and meet to review progress regularly, using the continuum of support framework. The special class teacher carefully plans and supports the transitions of the children into and out of the Autism class including transitions during the school day. The SNA's are assigned to support the children through transitions and to promote independence.

Ratification and Communication

This policy was reviewed by Staff, Pupils and Parents of Merlin Woods Primary School. It was ratified by the Board of Management on 27/4/2026.

Implementation and Review

The implementation of this policy will commence in September 2026. It will be reviewed in the school year 2030-2031.

Signed: *Paula O'Connor, Principal*

Pat Burke, Chairperson