

SUNCROFT NATIONAL SCHOOL

Policy Number: 47 - Special Needs Assistant Policy

REV:1

Introduction

Under the Education for Persons with Special Education Needs Act 2004, children with special educational needs are entitled to supports to enable them to participate in inclusive education. Such supports include Special Needs Assistants – SNA's

Rationale

This policy was formulated so that:

All staff have clear guidelines on procedures within the school

Recent amendments laid out in cir 0030/2014 and NCSE guidelines for LITH and SNA applications, Feb 2015 are included in our policy.

Relationship to school ethos

Suncroft NS has principle of equal respect for both children and their families and for the staff of the school, both teaching and non-teaching.

Aims and Objectives:

- To facilitate the inclusion of 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 Special Needs Child
- To enable the SNA to be an effective support to the class teacher
- To provide optimum learning experience for all children through judicious use of the skills and talents of the SNA
- To clarify the tasks and duties to be undertaken by the SNA

Cir 0030/2014 – SNAs are not allocated to individual pupils but to schools, as a school based resource, in the same manner that teachers are allocated to schools.

The provision of a quantum of support to schools gives school the autonomy and flexibility to manage their allocation of SNA support in order to utilise this support to the best possible effect. It allows schools to target support to those pupils who have the greatest degree of need at any given time, recognising that the level of need that a child may have may be variable over time. The school is in a position to use their educational experience and expertise to manage the level of support which had been allocated to them to provide for the care needs of identified children as and when those needs arise and to provide access to SNA support for all children who have been granted access to support.

Pupils will access the support of an SNA based upon their level of need, which can range from a requirement for brief periods during the day to most of the school day in some instances.

A key aspiration for pupils with special educational need is that they will, on completion of their school-based education, be able to graduate as young independent adults in so far as this is possible. There is therefore a need to balance the support provided in school with each pupil's right to acquire personal independence skills. As such, in order to give those pupils every opportunity possible to develop independent living skills, the assistive SNA support which is given to them should always be at the minimum level required to meet the care needs of the pupils.

Role of the Schools to Manage SNA Support

SNAs should be deployed by schools in a manner which best meets the care support requirements of the children enrolled in the school for whom SNA support has been allocated. It is a matter for schools to allocate the support as required, and on the basis of individual need, which allows schools flexibility in how the SNA support is utilised.

Once allocated to schools, SNAs are important and valued members of the school community. An SNA is an important whole school resource. SNAs participate fully in the life of the school and may therefore also assist other children in the school, who from time to time need assistance, or who have intermittent care needs, but who may not have been assessed as requiring SNA support on a permanent basis.

SNA duties are assigned at the discretion of the Principal, or another person acting on behalf of the Principal, and/or the Board of Management of a school or VEC in accordance with Circular 0071/2011.

The work of SNAs should, at the principal or teachers direction, be focussed on supporting the particular care needs of the student with special educational needs and should be monitored on an ongoing basis and modified accordingly

Care Needs

The purpose of the SNA scheme is to provide for the significant additional care needs which some pupils with special educational needs may have.

It is not possible to list all of the care needs that may arise but the care needs themselves must be of such significance that they are beyond that which would normally be expected to be provided by the class teacher or other teacher or fellow pupils or by modifying teaching approaches/assistive technology etc.

However, examples of the primary care needs which would be considered significant – and which might require SNA support are:

- **Assistance with feeding:** where a child with special needs requires adult assistance and where the extent of assistance required would overly disrupt normal teaching time
- **Administration of medicine:** where a child requires adult assistance to administer medicine and where the extent of assistance required would overly disrupt normal teaching time

- **Assistance with toileting and general hygiene: (including catheterisation)** where a child with special needs cannot independently self-toilet, and until such time as they are able to do so
- **Assistance with mobility and orientation:** on an ongoing basis including assisting a child or children to access the school, the classroom, with accessing school transport (where provided, school Bus Escorts should, in the first instance, assist a child to access school transport), or helping a child to avoid hazards in or surrounding the school. (Every effort must be made by the school to provide opportunities for independence e.g. the removal of hazards.)
- **Assisting teachers to provide supervision in the class, playground and school grounds:** at recreation, assembly, and dispersal times including assistance with arriving and departing from school for pupils with special needs where the school has made a robust case that existing teaching resources cannot facilitate such supervision
- **Non-nursing care needs associated with specific medical conditions:** such as frequent epileptic seizures or for pupils who have fragile health.
- **Care needs requiring frequent interventions including withdrawal of a pupil from a classroom when essential:** This may be for safety or personal care reasons, or where a child may be required to leave the class for medical reasons or due to distress on a frequent basis.
- **Assistance with moving and lifting of children, operation of hoists and equipment.**
- **Assistance with severe communication difficulties** including enabling curriculum access for pupils with physical disabilities or sensory needs (See also section 9) and those with significant, and identified social and emotional difficulties. Under the direction of the teacher, this might include assistance with assistive technology equipment, typing or handwriting, supporting transition, assisting with supervision at recreation, dispersal times etc.

The tasks noted above are the primary care support tasks for which access to SNA support will normally be provided.

The following tasks are the type of **secondary care associated tasks** which SNAs will often perform, but only once they have been allocated on the basis of the primary care support tasks listed above. The indicative list of secondary associated tasks listed below is not definitive and is reflective of the tasks detailed in Circulars 08/02 and 71/2011.

The associated support tasks which may be carried out, but which would not in themselves normally constitute a reason for the allocation of SNA support 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. To assist with cleaning of materials.
- Assistance with the development of Personal Pupil Plans for children with special educational needs, with a particular focus on developing a care plan to meet the care needs of the pupil concerned and the review of such plans.
- Assist teachers and/or Principal in maintaining a journal or care monitoring system for pupils including details of attendance and care needs. Assist in preparation of school files
- Planning for activities and classes where there may be additional care requirements associated with particular activities, liaising with class teachers and other teachers such as the resource teacher and school principal, attending meetings with parents, SENO, NEPS Psychologists, or school staff meetings with the agreement and guidance of class teacher/principal
- Assistance with enabling a pupil to access therapy or psycho-educational programmes such as anger management or social skills classes, under the direction of qualified personnel¹, including class teachers or support teachers.
- Assistance to attend or participate in out of school activities: walks, or visits, where such assistance cannot be provided by teaching staff.

The Role of the Classroom Teacher and Resource/Learning Support Teachers and the Role of an SNA to support those teachers

Students with special educational needs can have very complex learning needs and should be taught by qualified and experienced teachers who are equipped with the necessary skills to meet the needs of these students.

SNAs are recruited specifically to assist in the care needs of pupils with disabilities in an educational context. SNAs therefore do not have a teaching/pedagogical role and it would not be appropriate for pupils with special needs to be taught by unqualified personnel. Section 22 (1) of the Education Act 1998 states the primacy of the teacher in the education and personal development of students in schools. The classroom teacher is responsible for educating 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.

It is the responsibility of the classroom teacher to ensure that each pupil is taught in a stimulating and supportive classroom environment where all pupils feel equal and valued. The teacher will have access to all information that is likely to be relevant to teaching or supervising a pupil with special educational needs. The classroom teacher also has a central role in identifying and responding to pupils with additional needs. These responses will be informed and assisted by collaboration with colleagues, parents/guardians and others such as the school's NEPS psychologist and the local SENO.

Therapy interventions such as speech and language and physiotherapy services are often provided to students who require such therapy in schools by HSE medical professionals. The role of the SNA is to support the care needs of a child. Therefore, while it is appropriate for SNAs to assist students to access therapy support in schools, or to assist a therapist in providing support for a child or assist the child to perform therapy tasks directed by a therapist, it is not appropriate for an SNA to be expected to be responsible for the management or provision of therapy services in view of the particular skill-set required to deliver therapeutic interventions. Accordingly, the delivery of therapies is not in itself a reason to warrant the allocation of an SNA post nor can the provision of SNA support be made to compensate for a lack of therapy provision by qualified personnel.

The classroom teacher will also make specific accommodations for a pupil within the class as a result of concerns about a pupil's progress, application, communication, behaviour or interaction with peers.

When a pupil with significant and complex care needs has access to support from a SNA the classroom teacher will work closely with the SNA. However the class teacher continues to have primary responsibility for teaching and learning and for the social and emotional development and progress of the pupil.

Though the SNA can provide useful assistance to the teacher in ensuring that the pupil is able to access education, the role of the SNA is not to provide additional tuition, as this is the role of qualified learning support/resource teachers who may assist the teacher to provide additional teaching to pupils with special educational needs.

Additional Teaching Support

Role of the Resource/Learning Support teacher

Many children with significant special educational needs require additional teaching support in schools². In such circumstances, the classroom teacher will be supported by a resource teacher/ /learning support teacher, who are fully qualified teachers who will have access to additional training in the area of special education, and who will work closely with the class teacher to provide additional teaching support for children with special educational needs (SEN).

The classroom teacher and resource /learning support teacher will consider ways in which the curriculum can be differentiated or adapted to suit the needs of individual pupils so as to make the best use of the additional teaching hours. This may also involve identifying the most appropriate teaching strategies and programmes to meet the child's needs. Parents are typically consulted as part of this process.

Resource/learning support can be provided in a variety of ways. The support teacher might team-teach by working in the classroom with the class teacher or withdraw students in small groups and/or individually for a period of time (depending upon the nature of pupils needs) for intensive teaching of key skills.

Whereas the SNA may assist to ensure the delivery of both class teaching and additional teaching, the SNA is not the person who is designated to deliver this teaching or instruction.

