



## ***St Michael's House Special National School***

***Raheny***

### **CLASS ALLOCATION & PLACEMENT POLICY**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This policy was formulated as a result of a consultative approach between the School Principal and School Staff of St. Michael's House Special National School (SMH SNS) with the intention of providing a clear plan regarding how class staff allocations and pupil placements\* are decided. This plan is considered to be essential for the school to meet both individual needs and also to ensure the overall well-being of our pupils and staff.

This policy will also provide parents with information regarding the decision-making process involved in placing their child in a particular class and as it outlines the factors that are taken into consideration when creating class groups in SMH SNS.

\*In this policy, 'class allocation' refers to assigning staff to classes and 'class placement' refers to placing pupils in class groupings.

#### **RELATIONSHIP TO THE CHARACTERISTIC SPIRIT OF THE SCHOOL**

SMH SNS is committed to providing an individualised education programme for each pupil with the intention of enabling children to reach their full potential. Through a considered approach, the School Principal aims to balance the individual strengths and needs of each pupil with the strengths and needs of each child's class grouping and also with those of the whole school community. The School Principal also aims to allocate staff to classes and place children in class groupings in such a way that enables Teachers and Special Needs Assistants to support children in their learning in the best way possible. Provision is also made, where possible, to provide for the professional development of school staff by supporting a variety of teaching experiences.

#### **RATIONALE**

This policy ensures that school staff and parents have a clear understanding of how decisions in relation to class placements are reached when the School Principal is considering in which class to place each child. This policy outlines the transparent consultative process conducted by the School Principal with school staff to gain the input of those working directly with each child.

Information is sought regarding each child's individual and collective strengths and needs as they are divided into class groupings. The intention of this policy is also to reassure parents that their child's individual needs are taken into consideration by the School Principal during the planning of class placements with the aim of ensuring that all children benefit from a happy school life.

## **AIMS**

This policy aims:

- To facilitate the smooth, efficient running of the school
- To provide for the safety, health and well-being of all pupils and school staff
- To ensure that all children enjoy a happy school life
- To provide for the educational and care needs of all pupils in a balanced way
- To maximise the learning opportunities of each child through prudent class placement which utilises to the optimum, the varied range of individual teaching expertise in special educational needs within the teaching staff and also the individual knowledge and skills provided by the Special Needs Assistants
- To provide a consultative process through which the School Principal can liaise with school staff who can then express their views and have input into class allocations and class placements
- To provide for the professional development of school staff through varied class allocations
- To communicate to parents in a transparent way the process that is used by the school to decide on class placements
- To ensure that a balance of needs exist in each class so that all pupils' needs can be met equally and fairly
- To ensure that the schools' ability to meet the needs of existing pupils is not negatively impacted by the admission of new pupil(s) where the professional reports of applicants indicate that their needs as reported, could, in the professional judgement of the principal and Deputy Principal, taking into consideration the criterion contained in this policy, create an imbalance in the needs of proposed class placement options.

## **DECISION-MAKING PROCESS**

The pupil/teacher ratios and staffing allocations of Teachers and Special Needs Assistants made available to the school by the Department of Education and Skills and the National Council for Special Education are considered to be a significant factor when determining class placements for pupils and staff.

## **STAFF ALLOCATIONS**

The allocation of teaching and assisting duties within the school is a matter for the School Principal. However, it is the policy of the school to, where possible, reach collective agreement and consensus when distributing teaching and assisting duties.

*"The School Principal is responsible for the creation, together with the Board, parents of students and the teachers, of a school environment which is supportive of learning among the students and which promotes the professional development of the teachers". (Education Act – Section 23)*

The School Principal facilitates this process in a fair and equitable way by consulting with staff in the following ways:

SMH SNS currently has nine special classes. In the third term of each year, all Teachers and Special Needs Assistants are requested to complete the Consultation Re. Class Preference Form in which they list the classes that they would prefer to be assigned to for the coming year in order of preference.

When allocating classes, it is preferable for collective agreement to be reached with options such as deferring a move for a year being considered and additional professional development undertaken.

### **CRITERIA FOR DECIDING STAFF ALLOCATIONS TO CLASSES**

In deciding on allocations, the School Principal will allocate classes according to the Consultation Re Class Preference Form completed by school staff. The School Principal will also take other factors into account when making these decisions such as:

- Experience in teaching and working with children with a moderate general learning disability and /or autism and complex needs
- Contribution to overall school development in relation to teaching and learning
- Range of classes already taught/not taught or worked with
- Motivation
- Personality
- Special talents
- Opportunities for development, such as SESS In-Service Courses
- Flexibility and adaptability

Some teachers may have larger classes than colleagues. This normally 'evens itself out' over a number of years, so that an equitable workload is achieved.

Class allocation relies heavily on compromise and consensus. If this is not possible to reach, the School Principal will make an informed decision based on suitability, experience (whether a particular teacher has had the class before), special talents, courses taken and what is in the best interests of the children concerned. An interview is not held for the purpose of allocating classes.

### **NOTIFICATION OF STAFF PLACEMENTS AND PUPIL ALLOCATIONS**

Class allocation is usually completed by the end of June. However, in the case of temporary staff who are not CID holders, allocations will be made following appointment.

### **PUPIL PLACEMENTS**

A great deal of thought goes into placing children in classes each year. The process is also time-consuming, as the School Principal focuses on each child's needs. Every effort is made to place each child in a learning environment where they will be most successful. This learning environment incorporates several factors.

The School Principal uses the following criteria when compiling classes. This criterion is used to inform decision-making on an individual and collective basis with the aim of ensuring a balance in the overall needs of pupils across classes. This criteria is used in conjunction with the criteria 'balance of needs' that is contained in the SMH SNS Admissions Policy.

- Age
- Language and communication
- Behaviour

- Sensory
- Application to work
- Care needs
- Personality
- Attachments
- Additional Information

This policy is intended to inform parents of the placement procedures already in place at SMH SNS. The following section addresses parents' questions regarding those procedures by providing responses to typical questions posed by parents.

## **FURTHER INFORMATION FOR PARENTS – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **How are children placed in classes?**

Each year, the Principal and Deputy Principal meet to look at pupil placement. Teachers will be consulted, particularly if there have been challenges in the class in any given year. This information is then used by the School Principal to inform her decision-making regarding the compilation of class lists.

Parents of existing pupils are informed of their child's class, teacher's name, SNAs names and the Christian names of the other children in the class in the form of a social story that can be read to their child throughout the summer, in preparation for the new academic year.

Throughout this process, changes and adjustments are made. Each time a change is made it can cause a chain reaction of other changes.

Due to all of the points mentioned above, the final decision on pupil placements needs to rest with the School Principal. This is necessary, as the School Principal is the only person who is in possession of all of the information regarding every child's needs and can therefore take an overall view of what is best across all classes.

### **My child is NEW to SMH SNS. How does the school place a child when they don't know him/her as well as the other pupils?**

Through the admission process, the School Principal is already aware of a significant amount of information in relation to each pupil, i.e. information gained from the professional reports submitted prior to the closing date for admission for the following September.

Further information is gained by the school when new pupils are invited to the school for a transition visit to see the building and meet some of our school staff. The school principal will have the opportunity to observe the child on this visit and parents will be asked if there is any additional information that the school should know to assist in placing the child in their class for the coming year.

### **When will I know my child's class placement?**

Most parents will know their child's placement by the end of June. However, where new staff have to be appointed, parents will be informed as soon as is practicably possible.

**Can I request a particular Teacher and/or Special Needs Assistant for my child either in writing or in discussion with the School Principal and/or my child's present Teacher?**

You may, if you give the specific reasons, in writing before June. However, parents are requested to please remember that there are no guarantees that all requests can be granted.

Parents should be reassured by the fact that all staff, who know their child and have been working with them on a daily basis, are consulted by the School Principal as part of the decision-making process.

The School Principal will always endeavour to match the individual needs of each pupil with the best possible class placement for every child. However, whilst parents may have reasons for their child to be placed in a particular class, they are not privy to the individual needs of the other pupils in SMH SNS and therefore, are not in a position to make the best decision for the overall needs of each class. It is considered to be essential that the needs of all children are considered equally and it is the remit of the School Principal to examine the multiple factors, as per earlier criteria, regarding pupil placements.

**Can I request my child's class is placed with another child in a class? Or, can I request my child NOT be placed with another particular child?**

Consideration is given to attachments/friendships that a pupil may have formed during the year and this is part of the placement criteria that the School Principal refers to when compiling class lists. We are very aware of how important it is to foster and support 'buddies'/friendships among our pupils in every way possible. Equally, if a child has repeated difficulty with another pupil, the School Principal will try to separate non-constructive relationships in as far as is practicably possible.

**Do teachers request that certain pupils are placed in their class?**

No. Teachers are concerned about their class balance. Teachers want their colleagues to have successful years with their pupils. Additionally, Teachers are expected to be able to meet the needs of a variety of pupils and adapt to changes from year to year.

**When I get my child's class placement, will it be changed?**

The vast majority of pupils remain in their assigned class, however, it may be necessary to move children to ensure the safety, well-being and happiness of all pupils is maintained and all pupils have the best opportunity to maximise their opportunities for learning.

Parents are advised that moving a pupil may cause a chain reaction within the class balance and it may be necessary to move other children to ensure that the overall needs of everyone are best met. While we always consider the individual child, parents must realise that their child is part of a complex equation in school placements. So, a degree of flexibility and trust is requested of Parents in relation to changes in pupil placements.

If a parent has concerns about their child's class placement or that their child is moved class, they may talk to the School Principal about any concerns and be assured that those concerns will be shared with the Teacher so that your child's anxieties will be addressed. Teachers are expected to have the skills to help our pupils' transition and subsequently, adjust to their new class and staff and by working together we can try to create the right environment so that all our pupils can be happy in school.

Finally, we want to stress to parents that all information about their child is valued and heard. Teachers want to construct the smoothest transitions possible for their pupils. Parents can also help by being as positive and encouraging as possible to their children during the transition process to a new class, which impacts pupil, parent and teacher a great deal.

### **CLASSROOM ALLOCATION**

The Blue, Yellow, Red and Green Rooms are located together on the 'Junior Corridor' downstairs. Venus, Mars, Saturn and Jupiter Classes are located together on the Senior Corridor. Graduation Class and the Number 1 Room are located at the far end of the Senior Corridor.

In as far as is practicably possible, classes following similar curriculum will be located together in the school building.

### **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

All staff, under the guidance of the School Principal, participates in and contributes to the implementation of an effective and equitable class allocation policy. Grievances are dealt with at school level by the School Principal and will only transfer to the Board if a compromise cannot be reached.

### **SUCCESS CRITERIA**

The school evaluates the success of the policy through;

- Participation of all staff in the policy
- Smooth hand over of classes
- Calm and happy pupils
- Feedback from all staff
- Staff satisfaction
- Parental satisfaction

### **REVIEW AND IMPLEMENTATION**

A review will be conducted based on the success criteria outlined, or where consensus and compromise is not achieved.

### **RATIFICATION**

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2020. A copy has been given to all staff members and can be accessed in the secretary's office. Parents can access this policy on the school website.

### **REFERENCES**

- Education Act 1998 – Sections 22 and 23
- Circular 16/73

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**CONSULTATION RE CLASS PREFERENCE 2018/2019**

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Teacher</b>	<b>SNA</b>	
Please indicate your preference in relation to class allocation for the next school year by marking your first, second and third preferences.			
<b>Blue/Yellow Room</b>		<b>Venus/Saturn</b>	
<b>Red/Green</b>		<b>Mars/ Jupiter</b>	
<b>1-1</b>		<b>Graduation</b>	
<b>Further Comments:</b>			
<b>Signed:</b>		<b>Date:</b>	

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