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SPECIAL CLASSES FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIFIC SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DISORDER (SSLD)

Language Class Enrolment Policy

**Presentation Primary School,
Clonmel**

**Speech and Language Therapy Dept,
Community Care,
Western Road,
Clonmel**

Review Date: January 2024

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INTRODUCTION

There are two language classes catering for children with specific speech and/or language disorder (SSLD) based in the Presentation Primary School, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary. The original class was established in 1996 and an additional class was set up in 2006, as a senior class, by the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Health and Children.

Children who meet the criteria stated in D.E.S. Circular 0038/2007 are eligible to be considered for enrolment for the special language classes.

According to the terms of DES Circular 0038/2007, eligible pupils may spend up to two years in such classes. It is required that any pupil making an application will have already started junior infants in a mainstream class.

TERMINOLOGY

SSLD: Specific Speech and Language Disorder

This term was adopted by the D.E.S. to describe children with significant speech and/or language difficulties as their *primary* presentation. The term has also been used interchangeably with SSLI (see below) in the literature.

The term SSLD is used throughout D.E.S. documentation and is being used throughout this document.

SSLI: Specific Speech and Language Impairment

This term was previously adopted by the IASLT (Irish Association of Speech and Language Therapists) in their 2007 position paper where it was defined as follows:

Specific speech and language impairment (SSLI) is a term currently used to describe children whose skills in understanding and /or expressing themselves through speech and language is significantly impaired. These difficulties occur in the context of normal cognitive abilities and are not primarily attributable to social, emotional, behavioural, educational, physical or sensory difficulties” (Irish Association of Speech and Language Therapists IASLT 2007).

It was adopted at that time to be consistent with the term SSLD as used by the D.E.S. In recent times, a number of issues have been identified with the term SSLI and it therefore has been replaced by the term DLD

DLD: Developmental Language Disorder

This term describes children “likely to have language problems enduring into middle childhood and beyond, with a significant impact on everyday social interactions or educational progress” (Bishop et al 2017). The language disorder is not associated with a known differentiating condition.

Since the publication of the IASLT position paper *Supporting Children with Developmental Language Disorder in Ireland (May 2017)*, the term DLD has replaced the term SSLI in the speech and language therapy profession in line with international consensus.

OBJECTIVES OF THE LANGUAGE CLASSES

1. To develop to optimal levels, the child's academic, social and emotional, and communication skills through speech and language therapy and intensive teaching.
2. To maximize parental involvement in the above process by maintaining open communication.
3. To ensure the child experiences meaningful integration within the school.
4. To maintain open communication with the school of origin/return and other professionals working with the child so that the speech and language class intervention will be of maximum benefit to the child.

CRITERIA FOR ENROLMENT

A pupil enrolled in a special class for pupils with specific speech and/or language disorder (SSLD) should meet each of the following criteria as set by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in circular 0038/2007:

1. The pupil has been assessed by a psychologist on a standardised test of intellectual ability that places non-verbal ability within the average range (i.e. non-verbal IQ of 90) or above.
2. The pupil has been assessed by a speech and language therapist on a standardised test of speech and language development that places performance in one or more of the main areas of speech and language development at two standard deviations or more below the mean or at a generally equivalent level (i.e. 2 standard deviations or below or at or below a standard score of 70).
3. The pupil's difficulties are not attributable to hearing impairment. Where the pupil is affected to some degree by hearing impairment, the hearing threshold for the speech-related frequencies should be 40dB.
4. Emotional and behavioural disorders or a physical disability are not considered to be primary causes (DES Circular 0038/2007).

Note: It may be necessary to seek further professional reports to confirm a primary diagnosis of SSLD (e.g. neurologist, audiologist, clinical psychologist, psychiatrist, occupational therapist).

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Role of the Admissions Committee

A multi-agency admissions committee has been set up to advise the Board of Management on issues relating to the admission, retention, and discharge of the children to the SSLD class. The admissions committee comprises:

- speech and language class teachers
- speech and language class therapists
- school principal –representing the Board of Management of the school
- Speech and Language Therapist Manager
- designated educational psychologist - National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS).

The principal reports the recommendations of the admissions committee on language class policy and practice to the Board of Management. The committee also makes recommendations to the board on the enrolment, retention and discharge of children to the language class/es.

Role of Language Class Teachers

The language class teacher attends the admissions committee meeting and reports on the progress of pupils. S/he assesses each child's personal, social and academic needs, and in consultation with the child's parent/guardian and speech and language therapist, devises a Student Support Plan (SSP). The teacher ensures that the child follows the regular primary school curriculum taking into account the child's speech and language abilities and the goals of the speech and language therapist.

Role of School Principal:

The principal represents the Board of Management on the admissions committee. S/he is responsible for the day to day management of the classes and the support of children, staff and parents/guardians. S/he applies to the SENO for special needs assistant support, transport and assistive technology (if required). S/he also informs the SENO about language class enrolments, retention and discharges and children who have not been offered places. S/he liaises with the HSE in relation to the management of the language classes and consults with the NEPS psychologist as necessary. The principal also liaises with relevant school principals at times of intake and discharge.

Role of Speech and Language Therapist:

The Language Class speech and language therapists (SLT) attend the admissions committee meeting, to provide professional opinions on the suitability, eligibility and prioritisation of referrals to the Language Class/es. The SLT provides support and advice to SLTs involved in the referral process to the Language Class/es. The SLT provides intervention for the communication needs of children attending the SSL classes. This includes reviewing existing reports, setting and targeting current therapy goals in conjunction with teachers and parents, working closely with education staff regarding speech and language performance in classroom, and providing training on speech and language intervention for education staff when necessary.

Role of the Speech and Language Therapist Manager:

The role of the SLT manager (SLTM) is to attend the admissions committee meeting and provide advice and support to SLTs involved in the referral process to the Language Class/ es. The SLTM provides professional opinions with regard to suitability, eligibility and prioritisation of referrals, in consultation with the SLTs involved in the process. The SLTM oversees the Speech and Language Therapy service provision to the Language Class / es, and liaises with the Irish Association of Speech and Language Therapists on any pertinent issues arising (ref: Position paper on Specific Language Impairment in Children (IASLT 2007) .

Role of Educational Psychologist

The role of the designated NEPS psychologist to the school is to attend the admissions committee meeting. S/he has an advisory role on the committee in his/her capacity as educational psychologist.

The NEPS psychologist provides a psychological service to the school. The psychologist consults with the school principal and relevant professionals associated with the Language Class to identify priorities for involvement/intervention according to the NEPS model of service.

Referrals for NEPS involvement are arranged by the school principal according to agreed protocols.

Role of Board of Management

Having considered the recommendations of the admissions committee, the board makes decisions in relation to enrolment, retention and discharge of children in the language

classes. It is the responsibility of the board to ensure that staffing, support and resources are in place for the classes, within the provisions made available by the DES.

PROCEDURES FOR REFERRAL:

- Potential candidates for language class placement are typically identified by the local Speech and Language Therapy Team (SLT). The child's speech and language therapist provides parents/guardians with an information leaflet on the language class.
- The HSE speech and language therapist or the child's own school can support parents in the application process.
- Parents/Guardians make contact with the school to request information and an application form for the class. The principal will send a copy of the enrolment policy, the application form and a blank class teachers report to all parents/guardians who request same.
- The completed application form accompanied by a psychological report, speech and language report and a report from the child's current class teacher must be provided to the school by March 16th in the year of intake.
- The principal makes reports available to all members of the admissions committee prior to the admissions meeting.

REVIEW OF APPLICATIONS

The admissions committee meets as soon as possible after the closing date for applications to:

1. evaluate the new applications in the light of DES criteria (DES Circular 0038/2007) and deem them eligible/ineligible
2. prioritise the new eligible applicants using agreed procedures.
3. prioritise children not meeting eligibility criteria (if a concessionary place is available)
4. Following the prioritization of places to eligible candidates, if there are more places than eligible candidates, concessionary places are then considered according to Circular 0038/2007 (see below).
5. report their recommendations regarding allocation of places to the school Board of Management.

6. All class places are reviewed annually and awarded on a year by year basis by the Speech and Language Admissions Committee. (Please see Discharge Criteria and Procedures)

Waiting List

- If there are more children eligible for places than places offered, the admissions committee will advise the board of a prioritised waiting list. When the waiting list is accepted by the Board of Management, the list will operate for the first two terms of that school year. If a vacancy arises during that time, places will be offered to children on the waiting list in order of priority including those prioritized on the concessionary waiting list.

Concessionary Places

- If there is spare capacity in a language class because of insufficient eligible children, the admissions committee advises the Board of Management on offering concessionary places, to a maximum of two in each class, to children who do not meet the DES eligibility criteria but who could benefit from enrolment in the class for one year. Such placements must be supported by a recommendation from a speech and language therapist and/or psychologist.
- The question of a continued enrolment of these pupils for a second year can only be considered once all eligible pupils have been accommodated. Such candidates are rated against the new concessionary candidates in any given year.

Places arising during the year

Where a vacancy arises during the first two terms of the academic year and cannot be filled from:

- a) the waiting list of eligible candidates or
 - b) a concessionary list as outlined above
- a new application process is initiated.

In cases where an eligible candidate enters the language class in term 2, thus missing the entire first term of Year 1, they may be offered continued placement after Year 2 if deemed necessary and appropriate by the Speech and Language Admissions Committee.

PROCEDURES FOR ENROLMENT

- The school principal reports the recommendations of the admissions committee to the Board of Management and the board decides which children will be offered places.

- The school principal then writes to the parents/guardians of all the children, informing them of the decision of the board in relation to their child. Parents/guardians of pupils who are not offered places are informed of their right to appeal such a decision.
- Parents/guardians of pupils being offered a place are required to complete an acceptance form, transport and other forms required by NCSE which are returned to the school, if they are accepting a place for their child. New entrants are initially offered a placement for one year, subject to ongoing review. The main purpose of this review is to monitor the ongoing suitability of the placement and to consider any additional professional reports which may be available.
- An open day is held in June for parents/guardians of both the children already attending the language class and the new entrants. The children visit the classrooms and parents/guardians meet with school staff to discuss school and language class procedures and policies.

Transport

A child who is enrolled in a special language class may be eligible for free transport to the school, subject to the DES School Transport Scheme. Details and application form for school transport is sent by the principal to a child's parent/guardian when a language class place is being offered.

Circular 0054/2022 –Exemptions from the study of Gaelge

2.2.4 'Where a pupil is currently enrolled in a recognised special class in a mainstream school or who has previously been enrolled in a recognised special class in a mainstream school and who is transitioning to mainstream provision, that pupil is automatically entitled to an exemption from the study of Irish without application'

Pupils availing of such an exemption should be encouraged to engage with the study of oral Irish language for as long as possible in keeping with the integrated approach in the Primary Language Curriculum and acknowledging that pupils at a young age adapt and improve over time.

Parents may decide not to avail of this automatic entitlement to an Irish Exemption. In which case the child will be integrated into a mainstream class (at their level) for Gaelge lessons.

Communication with Special Education Needs Organizer (SENO)

The principal will inform the SENO of the decisions made by the Board of Management relating to the retention/discharge of children already in the language classes and decisions made by the board relating to all new applicants including candidates who were eligible but were not offered places.

QUERIES AND APPEALS

Queries

Where a parent/guardian has a query in relation to the procedures for enrolment, the parent/guardian should contact the school principal. If necessary, a meeting will be arranged between the parent/guardian and members of the admissions committee as appropriate.

Appeals

According to Section 29 of the Education Act 1998, a parent/guardian may appeal a decision by a Board of Management not to enroll a child. Parents are informed of this information if their child is not offered a place in the Language Class. The appeal is made in writing to: General Secretary, Appeals Administration Unit, Department of Education and Skills. The appeal must be made within 42 calendar days from the date of the original letter informing them of the decision.

DISCHARGE CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES

The admissions committee meets in the second term to review the existing Language Class pupils in advance of the intake meeting to make recommendations regarding:

- a) discharge
- b) placement for a second year. Recommendation for a second year for all students will be reviewed annually by the Speech and Language Class Admissions Committee. Pupils will be offered a second year if deemed appropriate only.
- c) consideration for a possible third year in exceptional circumstances. If it is the opinion of the relevant professionals that a child's continuing SSLD and related educational needs can only be addressed in the context of continued language class provision for a third year, this child's needs will be considered within the concessionary placement provision as outlined in circular 0038 /007, should a concessionary place be available in the new year of intake.

A report is furnished by the class teacher and SLT and the psychologist as necessary to support this review process.

- When the decision is made that a child will be discharged from the language class, the child's parent/guardian is informed.

- Parental permission is sought for the principal of the Presentation Primary School to contact the principal of the child's next school, so as to establish close links as early as possible between the two schools and the staff involved. Permission is also sought so that end of year reports compiled on the child i.e. class report, speech and language therapy report and any other relevant reports can be forwarded to the child's next school.

REVIEW AND RATIFICATION

This policy was reviewed and ratified by the admissions committee and the school Board of Management in March 2024.

Róisín Hennessy
Chairperson of Board of Management

Date: 21st March 2024

Appendix 1: Summary of referral/enrolment procedures

Parent contacts Presentation Primary School for an application form.



Parents complete the application supported by 3 reports (Speech and Language report, Psychological report, Class teacher report) and return it to the school.



Admissions committee meeting makes recommendation to board, regarding pupils who are eligible for a place in the class



The Board of Management offers places to a maximum of 7 in each class and includes acceptance forms and transport applications with the offers. Parents of pupils who are not being offered a place are also informed in writing at this time.



Parents will return a completed acceptance form if they are accepting a place for their child. If a parent is not accepting a place they will indicate this on the acceptance form.



An open day is held in June for parents/guardians of both the children already attending the language class and the new entrants.



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Application Form: Speech and Language Class

Name of child: _____ Date of birth: _____

PPS no. _____

Name of Parents/Guardians: _____

Address: _____

Nationality: _____ First Language _____

Contact phone no. _____

Name of school child is attending: _____

School address; _____

School phone no: _____

Name of Principal: _____

Current Class _____

I wish to apply for a place in the Special Speech and Language Class for September _____

I understand that I must submit a Speech and Language report, a Psychological report and a Class Teacher's report before March 16th _____ (year)

Please tick:

- Speech and Language report
- Psychological report
- Class teacher's report
- Copy of child's birth certificate

Signed: _____ (Parents/Guardians)

Date: _____