

St. Patrick's De La Salle Boys National School

Language Class Policy

St Patrick's De La Salle Boy's National School has a Special Class for Pupils with Specific Speech and Language Disorder hereafter referred to as the Language Class. This class caters for the needs of children with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) previously known as Specific Language Impairment (SLI) or Specific Speech and Language Disorder (SSLD). The class caters for pupils from Junior Infants upwards, throughout county Mayo. The maximum enrolment in the class is 7 pupils. The class is staffed by a full time teacher. A senior speech and language therapist works with the pupils in the class 3 days per week. The pupils in the Language Class are integrated with the other pupils at playtime, during school trips and outings, and through integration for some curricular activities when appropriate.

Pupils follow the normal primary school curriculum, but they do not study Irish. They receive intensive group and one to one Speech Therapy. There is a purpose built Language Therapy unit in the Special Language Class for this purpose.

Department of Education and Skills (DES) Circular 0038/2007 sets out the criteria for Enrolment in the Special Language Class.

What is Developmental Language Disorder?

Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) 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., 2016b). The language disorder is not associated with a known differentiating condition, for example, Autism; Down Syndrome; Hearing Impairment; or Intellectual Disability. The term DLD is now being used in Ireland and worldwide since May 2017.

What do we know about DLD?

- It is very common, more common than Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Autism Spectrum Disorder (Bishop, 2010).
- It may be lifelong for many individuals with effects on their academic and their social and emotional development.
- Children with DLD can have co-occurring challenges with motor, sensory, and cognitive skills.

- Children with developmental language disorders present with speech and language difficulties where skills are not developing in line with expected developmental sequence.
- These children may exhibit:
 - Difficulty in understanding what is said to them
 - Difficulty in expressing needs, thoughts and feelings, in developing vocabulary and using well-formed sentences
 - Poor concentration and listening skills, often preventing progress in the classroom
 - Poor motor control which may affect a child's ability to produce the sounds necessary for speech
 - Associated educational, emotional and behavioural difficulties

Criteria for enrolment

A pupil enrolled in a special class for pupils with SSLD must meet *each* of the following criteria:

- a) The pupil has been assessed by a psychologist on a standardised test of intellectual ability that places non-verbal ability within the average range or above (i.e. non-verbal IQ of 90, or above).
- b) The pupil has been assessed by a speech and language therapist on a standardised test of 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, at or below a standard score of 70).
- c) 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.
- d) Emotional and behavioural disorders or a physical disability are not considered to be primary causes.

Referral Procedure

Not all children with a clinical diagnosis of DLD will meet the Department of Education and Skills' eligibility criteria for the Language Class placement. Not all children with a clinical diagnosis of DLD will require placement in a Language Class. Other models of education and SLT provision may be more appropriate.

The Speech and Language Therapist, in agreement with parents, refers children for consideration for the Language Class if they feel it is appropriate to the child's needs. The Speech and Language Therapist submits a referral which must be accompanied by the following:

1. Speech and Language Therapy Report
2. Psychologist's Report
3. Pre-School or School Report
4. Parental Report
5. Social, Emotional, and Behavioural Rating Scale

A specific time is allocated in early Spring for each applicant to visit the class with their parents/guardians. The parents get the opportunity see the school and class, and meet the relevant staff. This also gives the teacher and Speech and Language Therapist a chance to meet the child.

Selection of Applicants for Admission

The Admissions Committee meets in Spring with regard to discharge and to recommend admission for the following September. This decision is informed by the professional opinions of the school team. This will include the recommendation regarding which current pupils will stay in the class for a further year, and which pupils may return to their local primary schools. The Admissions Committee consists of:

1. School Principal
2. HSE Speech and Language Therapy Manager / Designated Officer
3. HSE Speech and Language Therapist in the Language Class
4. Language Class Teacher
5. Occasionally, HSE Psychologist

A priority list is drawn up following standard selection criteria, as described below. Those children at the top of the list will be recommended the places in the class for the following academic year.

Selection Criteria

The Language class operates with a reduced pupil-teacher ratio of 7:1. The Admissions Committee applies a rating scale, which considers a number of criteria, for each child referred. The purpose of the rating is to estimate each child's potential to benefit from placement in the Language Class. The Rating Scale is informed by

- Psychology Report
- Speech and Language Therapy Report
- Report from Class Teacher/Pre-School Leader
- Parents' Report
- Social, Emotional, and Behavioural Rating Scale

The children referred include pupils from the current year's class who would benefit from a second year. Where the number of children referred exceeds the number of places available, names are placed on a waiting list for that admission year.

The recommendation of the Admissions Committee will be conveyed to the Board of Management, and if approved, will be conveyed in writing to parents as soon as possible.

Where a child is offered a place in the Language Class, parents are asked to return an acceptance/non-acceptance form to the Language Class Speech and Language Therapist within one week of receipt of the offer. Where an offer is declined, the next child on the waiting list will be offered a place. The list of candidates who have

accepted a place is then forwarded to the school. This information will be conveyed to the Board of Management, and, if approved, the school will contact the parents to proceed with the enrolment.

The referring Speech and Language Therapist/agent is notified in writing regarding the final placement decision.

All pupils are accepted on the understanding that they and their parents fully accept the school's Code of Discipline, and all other policies currently in place, or which the school's staff and/or Board of Management may draw up from time to time.

Pupils in the Language Class will experience the normal day-to-day happenings, determined by the reality of school life, and the existing customs and practices. Every child in the school is bound by school policies, both in existence and those developed from time to time by the staff and/or Board of Management. The school cannot offer any additional tuition, support and supervision beyond that which if offered to any other pupil in the school, at times other than when the school is in operation during the normal school year. The Class Teacher will periodically be required to participate at Staff Development and Curriculum Courses. Such professional development events take place within the existing school year, and all pupils are in the care of their parents at these times. Such extraordinary closures will be notified to parents to all pupils through the medium of the school website, as well as through regular notices to parents.

A pupil in the Language Class will not have any separate or additional provisions put into place from other classes in the event of staff illness, absences or whole school events such as school visits, parish liturgy etc

From year to year, the allocation of teachers to classes is focused on the needs of the whole school, and consequently the school cannot guarantee long-term continuity or predictability in personnel.

Other professional personnel involved with the Language Class include the NEPS psychologist and the HSE Occupational Therapy service.

Placement Reviews

Eligible pupils may spend up to two years in the Language class.

The pupil's progress will be reviewed throughout each year, and the Language Class Teacher and the Speech and Language Therapist will give feedback to parents

The Language Class personnel, in consultation with parents, will carry out a review regarding suitability of placement, during the first term. Where difficulties arise, it

may be necessary for the Admissions Committee to meet regarding the child's placement.

When a child leaves the Language Class during the academic year, this is communicated in writing to the relevant parties by the school Principal

Where a placement is terminated, the place is then offered to the next child on the waiting list.

Discharge from the Language Class

A child may be discharged from the Language Class when any or some of the following apply:

- The child has come to the end of the 2 year period
- The child has reached the upper class limit for attendance in the Language Class
- The Admissions Committee considers the pupil ready to return to mainstream education
- The Admissions Committee no longer considers the Language Class as the most suitable placement for the child's educational development
- The parents/guardian of the child request transfer from the Language Class
- The Admissions Committee deems that the child is no longer benefitting from Language Class placement
- In accordance with school guidelines on behaviour/non attendance

Prior to discharge, formal speech and language and academic assessments will be carried out and reports forwarded to the relevant parties.

The Language Class personnel will give feedback of assessment results and recommendations to parents on the pupil's discharge.

Parents have the opportunity to appeal the discharge decision through the DES.

School Transport

Pupils in the Special Language Class are entitled to free transport to the Language Class nearest to his/her place of residence, subject to the terms of the School Transport Scheme. The Schools Transport Service facilitates the children attending this class in the same manner as children attending other Special Classes/Schools. The school will assist parents to apply for school transport through the local SENO's office. The contact for this service currently is:

School Transport Section,

DES

Tullamore

Co. Offaly

Telephone 057- 9324482

Transition to Mainstream Education

The following recommendations are made with regard to Language Class pupils returning to mainstream:

- Prior to return, pupils attend the local school for a limited but regular time slot.
- Parents and the Language Class personnel will liaise with the local school personnel regarding the above.
- The possibility of Special Education Teaching for the child transitioning to mainstream classes will be investigated in advance depending on the needs of the child as informed by formal assessment by Language Class Speech Therapist and Language class teacher.

Professional Development of Staff

As the work of the Language Class involves a very specific area of education, it is recommended that the teacher/s is facilitated to attend the Annual Regional Language Class Teacher/SLT Meeting and relevant conferences.