



St. Mary's Road
Buncrana,
Co. Donegal

St. Mura's National School

Tel. No. 074 9362309

Roll No.16854V

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Special Needs Assistant Policy

'Special Needs Assistants are recruited specifically to assist in the care of pupils with disabilities in an educational context' (Guidelines on Special Needs Assistants, INTO)

The Special Needs Assistant works under the direction of the teacher. They provide support for the pupil, the teacher, the curriculum and the school.

1. Support for the Pupil

Although the SNA is employed with specific responsibilities for one pupil/a number of specified children, the whole principle of inclusion means that a child who has a physical or learning disability should be helped to work in the company of other children. So, support for the pupil means support for all pupils with whom the SNA comes into contact.

2. Support for the Teacher

This involves the SNA in being of general assistance to the class teacher, under the direction of the principal in carrying out duties of a non-teaching nature. Support for the teacher will involve her carrying out a number of routine tasks such as escorting groups of young children to work areas outside the classroom, preparation and tidying up of classrooms, assisting children boarding and alighting from buses etc (See Role and Responsibilities).

3. Support for the Curriculum

This involves supporting teaching, to help give pupils access to all areas of the curriculum, including PE and IT.

4. Support for the School

SNA's are not only part of the staff of the school, but are part of a team which is involved in translating policy into practice in order to further the aims of the school.

The Role of the Class Teacher

The SNA always works under the direction of the class teacher. The teacher plans lessons and directs learning. The SNA provides support to the teacher, and ,through this, to the pupils and to the teaching of the curriculum. She works under the direction of the teacher whether in the whole class situation or on her own with a small group of pupils or an individual.

For the SNA to work most effectively, it is important to define her responsibilities clearly. She also needs to be aware of the standards of behaviour expected and what the pupils are expected to learn in a given class. She needs to know what the school's and class teacher's expectations are in terms of the pupil's progress. She should be made fully aware of the pupil's special educational needs and what they entail if she is to be



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able to deal with them confidently and help give the pupil access to the curriculum. She should be given relevant

Information on the needs and attainments of her assigned pupil and on the special educational provision being made for him/her. Because the SNA often spends more time with the pupil than the teacher does, she may well have important contributions to make to IEPs and reviews.

The Role of the SNA and Responsibilities

The role of the SNA is

- To foster the participation of pupils in the social and academic processes of the school
- To enable pupils to become more independent learners
- To help to raise standards of achievement for specific pupils.

Fostering the participation of pupils in the social and academic processes of the school

This form of support for pupils is seen in

- Supervising and assisting small groups of pupils in activities set by the teacher - Activities are set by teachers and the SNA works with the group under the management of the teacher. The SEN pupil is then able to work with the group without being stigmatised as 'different' because of frequent separation from their classmates for individual tuition.
- Developing pupils' social skills.
- Supporting children in groups, who might otherwise have been separated from other children for individual attention, promotes the inclusion of those children in mainstream work.
- Spotting early signs of bullying.

Some children find it easier to confide in an SNA and she may be the first to be alerted to instances of bullying. All such information must be treated as serious and be notified to the class teacher straight away.

- Helping the inclusion of all children.

She can do much to help the inclusion of children into their school and support individual children who for one reason or another find it difficult to form friendships and good relationships with others. Organising games on the yard is a particularly successful way to do this.

- Keeping children on task.



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Helping the child to maintain focus and bringing him/her back on task will enable them to become better learners. She can do this by explaining points quietly and repeating teacher's instructions. It is helpful to make notes for the pupil as the teacher is speaking.

Enabling Pupils to Become More Independent Learners

Children learn better if their efforts are appreciated and they feel valued. As they gain confidence, they will become more independent. SNAs can help pupils develop independence in their learning in several ways:

- **Showing interest** - SNAs have an important part to play in raising the self-esteem of children by showing interest not only in their work but in what they do outside of school.
- **Assisting individuals in educational tasks** – The SNA can assist the pupil to increase his/her knowledge, skill and understanding but this assistance must be balanced. Only intervene if absolutely necessary. Allow the pupil to make mistakes – never do the work for them. Be there to help, support and encourage - not by providing the right answer.

It is important not to allow or encourage the child to 'cling' as this can be stultifying and demeaning for the pupil. It can also mean the child gets insufficient input from the teacher. The SNA needs to know when to stand back and enable the child to work with other pupils in a group.

- **Working with outside agencies** – The SNA can play an important part in supporting the work of outside agencies such as speech therapists and educational psychologists, under the guidance of the class teacher.

Assisting pupils with physical needs – Assisting pupils, when help is necessary, in a tactful manner, and not at other times, enables pupils with physical disabilities to become more independent learners and to move towards independence as adults. This applies to assistance with clothing, feeding, toileting and general hygiene. The pupil may need assistance to board and alight from school buses or on out- of- school visits, walks and similar activities. The SNA will also be required to assist the teacher in the supervision of pupils with special needs during assembly, recreational and dispersal periods.

Help to raise standards of achievement of all pupils

Even when working with individual pupils, the SNA is assisting with the others in the class as they are thereby free to progress at their own pace.



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- **Being involved at whole class level** – SNAs can alternate helping with particular pupils. An extra pair of hands, eyes and ears is very useful in art, games and PE. Supporting the teacher by listening to reading or reading to small groups is very helpful. She can also reinforce the teachers work on spelling, for example.
- **Preparing classroom materials** – Getting materials ready for the lesson, preparing worksheets, preparing books and setting up equipment all help free up teaching time to the benefit of all the class.

Ongoing professional development

The Board of Management of St.Mura's N.S. encourages our special needs assistant/s to avail of relevant training to upgrade their knowledge and skills in the area of special needs. This may be supported by defraying the costs of such courses if funds available to the Board of Management allow.

Confidentiality

Information received on children, and observations made in classrooms, need to be handled sensitively and carefully and are often only to be shared with particular members of staff.

SNAs may be closer to parents than teachers, as they may themselves be from the immediate community, and may, or might have been, themselves parents of pupils in the school. Some parents may therefore consider them more approachable than teachers.

It is very important therefore, that the SNA recognises the rules of confidentiality which govern her role as a member of the school staff. **No discussion of the child, the teacher, the class or the events of the school day should take place without consultation and agreement with the class teacher.**

Parents with questions or issues about school policy or practice should be referred directly to the class teacher or the principal teacher. This applies to direct face-to-face communication or indirect telephone communication. (It is not appropriate for parents to have a phone number of a member of staff).

This policy was reviewed by the school staff in early 2019. It was ratified by the Board of Management on 11th of March 2019. It will be reviewed as required.

Signed:------(Cathaoirleach of the B.O.M.)

------(Principal Teacher)



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