Guidelines for Supporting Students with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties

An information guide for Post-Primary Schools

This information guide has been developed to assist schools in responding to the needs of pupils presenting with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. It draws on principles and practices outlined in the documents and sources highlighted below. Schools are advised to consult these for additional information and guidance.

A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Teachers www.education.ie

Developing a code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools www.newb.ie

Guidelines on the Individual Education Plan Process www.ncse.ie

Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs: Post-Primary Guidelines www.education.ie

Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention www.education.ie

Along with resources available from:
Special Education Support Service www.sess.ie
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment www.ncca.ie
SPHE Support Service www.sphe.ie
National Behaviour Support Service www.nbss.ie

Planning a response to the needs of students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties

Behavioural, emotional and social difficulties occur on a continuum from mild, transient difficulties to difficulties which are significant and persistent. The responses detailed below are incremental, moving from more generalised supports available to <u>all</u> students, to additional supports for <u>some</u> students, and to the use of more systematic and individualised supports for a <u>few</u> students who present with more severe and persistent needs. Each level of support builds on the preceding level. The timing and pace of implementation may vary depending on the level of need and the nature of the presenting difficulties. Thus the following framework should be used flexibly, with interventions tailored to the individual needs of students.

Level 1: Whole school approaches (Support for All)

Educational research highlights the need to adopt a whole school approach in addressing the behavioural, emotional and social difficulties experienced by students. Interventions are focused on the main student body and seek to promote positive student behaviour and learning for all. Approaches include:

1. **Creating a positive, safe and caring** school climate that promotes good behaviour. This includes
   - Promoting partnership and positive relationships among staff, students and parents.
   - Developing good staff communication and support systems.
   - Having well established student support systems i.e. Tutor System, Pastoral Care, Guidance Counsellor, Support Team/Care Team, SEN personnel, peer mentoring etc.
   - Listening to students to achieve a shared understanding of their needs.
   - Identifying and responding to the needs of students through the guidance planning process.

2. **Creating positive learning environment by:**
- Ensuring student access to appropriate curricula, including SPHE Junior Cycle & RSE Senior Cycle; Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP); Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA); Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) etc, where available.
- Utilising best practice in teaching, with a diversity of learning opportunities, including use of differentiation for learning and behaviour to cater for different levels of ability, interests and learning styles (*Developing a Code of Behaviour,* NEWB; www.sess.ie; www.ncca.ie).
- Effective organisation of teaching through use of mixed ability teaching, co-operative learning, team-teaching etc.

3. **Having effective systems for promoting positive behaviour** including:
- Clarifying and teaching clear learning and behavioural expectations through development of effective classroom rules and routines, with a focus on positive expectations.
- Having an agreed, fair and appropriate system of rewards and sanctions.
- Fostering positive relationships between and among teachers and students.
- Facilitating opportunities for peer support among students by focusing on the positive and celebrating success.
- Attending to students' strengths and interests and providing opportunities to help build their self-esteem and sense of achievement.
- Effective deployment of student support systems (i.e. Pastoral Care, Guidance Counsellor, SEN Personnel and Student Support/Care Teams etc).
- Adopting a consistent, structured approach across the school when responding to challenging behaviour, based on a positive approach to behaviour management and reflecting the individual circumstances and needs of students.
- Ensuring adequate supervision during transition times to maintain a positive and safe school climate.

4. **Early identification and monitoring** of students experiencing behavioural, emotional and/or social difficulties. This is supported by:

- Ongoing liaison with parents, relevant teachers and seeking students' perspective on their difficulties.
- Having clear procedures for collection and analysis of schoolwide data, including information on entry to Post-Primary schools (i.e. use of Post-Primary Transfer Review; *A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools,* NEPS), and ongoing reports from subject teachers, Tutors, Year Heads, etc.
- Engaging in ongoing school based assessment as necessary, covering such areas as learning environment and screening information with regard to learning and behaviour skills, in addition to information gathering and monitoring of social, communication and emotional difficulties.

5. Planning a systematic response to meeting the needs of individual students by:

- Adopting a graduated problem solving, solution oriented framework of assessment and intervention, through a process of identifying concerns, planning interventions, monitoring and reviewing progress.
- Teaching social skills through Social Personal and Heath Education (SPHE) curriculum and evidence based behavioural and social skills programmes.
- Employing a collaborative, team approach through active collaboration with parents, subject teachers, SEN personnel, Guidance Counsellor, Home School Community Liaison Teacher (HSCL), School Completion Personnel, NEPS and National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS), where available.
- Developing support plans (in consultation with principal and school management team) which are communicated to all relevant personnel and are monitored and reviewed at regular intervals.
- Accessing internal expertise and additional training and supports for staff through NEPS, SESS and other services, as necessary, in the area of behaviour management, including approaches for promoting emotional well-being.

Level 2: School Support (for Some)

Students presenting with learning, emotional, behavioural and social difficulties may require additional supports from subject teachers; Year Head; SEN personnel; Guidance Counsellor and/or Student Support/Care Team etc. Programme effectiveness is enhanced when a key teacher (co-ordinating teacher) takes responsibility for developing, monitoring and reviewing interventions, in close collaboration with subject teachers and other relevant school personnel. This includes:

1. Review learning environment to identify those aspects of the whole school, classroom and social environment that are working well and those that may require further attention (e.g. use Learning Environment Checklist: *A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools,* NEPS).

2. Systematic gathering of information through liaison with relevant teachers, parents and groups or individual student in order to achieve a shared understanding of the student's needs and behaviours in context (e.g. use of Gathering Information Checklist: My Thoughts About School etc; *A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools,* NEPS).

3. Collating school assessment data and engaging in additional ongoing assessment as necessary (e.g. Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs: Post-Primary Guidelines; *A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools, NEPS*).

4. Liaise, as required, with NEPS and other professionals on an advisory/consultative basis and with SESS in relation to staff training needs.

5. In consultation with student, parents, teachers and school management team, draw up, implement and review a School Support Plan (specifying realistic targets, strategies for teaching social skills, time frame etc).

Level 3: School Support Plus (for a Few)

This involves a more intensive, individualised response for those with more severe and/or persistent needs and will often involve liaison with outside agencies and professionals. This involves:

1. Consulting with student, parents, subject teachers, support teachers, including Student Support/Care Team, NEPS and other professionals, as appropriate, when developing and implementing an intervention plan, facilitated by a key teacher or co-ordinating teacher.

2. Using interview and observation along with relevant records and checklists to achieve a full understanding of the student's needs and strengths, including possible causes and triggers of the student's behaviour in the school environment (i.e. using frequency recording and/or ABC charts).

3. Agree realistic, achievable targets with the criteria and timeframe for their achievement clearly stated, along with identifying the necessary resources and supports, paying particular attention to consistent implementation across the school setting (i.e. cross curricular).

4. Agree strategies for teaching appropriate behaviours and social and emotional skills using available school resources (e.g. Guidance Counsellor, SEN teachers, HSCL, School Completion and NBSS Personnel, where available).

5. Agree approaches to promote pro-social behaviours (including rewards and incentives) and a range of strategies for responding to misbehaviour that are clearly articulated and managed by all relevant adults in the school.

6. In consultation with student(s), parents, relevant teachers and the school management team, draw up, implement and review an individual education plan, with an agreed understanding of how interim progress will be recorded and assessed.