



**Stepping Stones**

Special School for Children  
with Autism & Complex Needs

# Curriculum Content



# Curriculum Overview

In Stepping Stones School we strive to provide a high standard of teaching and learning within a positive and enriching learning environment. We realised that providing educational experiences for students with special educational needs within the framework of the mainstream curriculum is a challenge. The advantage of the mainstream curriculum is that it provides a clear structure within which many of the needs of special education can be catered for. We believe that the educational experiences of our students should reflect what is available to their peers. While each student has his/her own individual educational plan, the opportunities for learning that co-operation and group work present should not be ignored.

As a school we believe in a collaborative approach, the professional responsibility for the education of the students lies within the class teacher, SNAs, Behavioural team, Director of Education and Principal.

Stepping Stones Special School for Children with Autism and Complex Needs aims to provide an eclectic education to enable the child to live their lives to the full and to realise their potential as a unique individual. In order to achieve this, we offer a broad and balanced curriculum that is child centred and evidence based to all pupils, taking into consideration their learning style and their individual needs and abilities. The curriculum is divided into two areas: 'Core Curriculum Areas' and 'Wider Curriculum Areas'. Adaptation of the curriculum to suit our school is achieved through the preparation and continuous updating of the school plan.

We have decided that our Core Curriculum areas will encompass those that are related to the triad of impairment that characterises children with Autism and Complex Needs.

They are as follows:

- Learning to learn skills Ref: ABLLS-R
- Language and Communication (English)
- Mathematics
- Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE), including Relationship & Sexuality (RSE)
- ICT Basic skills
- Physical Education/Sensory Needs

Our Wider Curriculum areas are:

- Visual Arts: Art, Music and Drama.
- SESE: History, Geography & Science

All the above subjects are taught through a cross-curricular approach which provides a meaningful way in which students can use knowledge learned in one context as a knowledge base in other contexts in and out of school, thus provoking generalisation.

The reasons behind using a cross curricular approach are:

1. Increases Motivation:
  - Cross-curricular teaching can increase students' motivation for learning and their level of engagement. In contrast to learning skills in isolation, when students participate in interdisciplinary experiences they see the value of what they are learning and become more actively engaged.
2. Improves Learning:
  - Cross-curricular teaching provides the conditions under which effective learning occurs.

The bulk of the available research would seem to strongly indicate that students who participate in any form of extra-curricular activities benefit from enhanced status amongst peers, a wider social network, and an early understanding of several crucial 'life skills'. The potential self-esteem gains to be made from these outcomes can lead to improvements in other areas and can in many cases act as a deterrent to challenging behaviour. Stepping Stones offers to its pupils a number of extra-curricular activities, such as: Yoga, Music, Football league, trips to the local community and School tours.

## Assessment

The core of our assessment policy is that all pupils should experience success at school. It endeavours to identify at the earliest possible opportunity, pupils' specific learning difficulties that emanate from their diagnosis of Autism and Complex Needs, putting in place a whole school response to their needs.

Stepping Stones Special School for Children with Autism and Complex Needs has an evidence based teaching and learning Ethos. Our ultimate goal would be to improve learning through effective assessment practices, ensuring that each pupil is enabled to reach their full potential.

Assessment is an on-going process throughout the child's education. Therefore, it is important that all members of the teaching staff and Behavioural team are involved in developing, implementing, and reviewing the assessment policy. Parents should be also involved in the assessment policy, which helps in creating a sense of ownership and allows for a more effective implementation.

It is our intention that teachers will assess students in September, using one of the assessment tools below. Scores will be recorded and stored in the Secretary's office and accessed by the class teacher as needed. The class teacher may wish to have a copy stored in their classroom (which should be kept in the Assessment folder). The results will be analysed by the Principal, Director of Education, and Class teacher.

The assessments utilised in Stepping Stones are as follows:

- The Psychoeducational Profile-Third Edition (PEP-3) to assess pupils who are under the age of 6 if appropriate.
- The Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills (ABLLS) ages 4-14.
- The Verbal Behaviour Milestones Assessment and Placement Program: The VB-MAPP to assess pupils who are at the ages from 4-14.
- TEACCH Transition Assessment Profile (TTAP) to assess pupils who are 14-18.
- The Assessment of Functional Living Skills (AFLS) to assess pupils from 14-18.
- ASDAN- encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning 14-18

Please note that the ages specified above may vary as all our pupils have a diagnosis of Autism and Complex Needs. They present with a General Learning Disability that ranges from Mild, to Moderate to Severe. Therefore, the assessment tools mentioned may vary in accordance with the students' needs and abilities. The school personnel involved in assessing will choose the most appropriate assessment tool.

# Individual Educational Plan (IEPs)

## What is an Individual Education Plan?

An Individual Education Plan (IEP) is a written document prepared for a named student. It specifies the learning goals that are to be achieved by the student over a set period of time and the teaching strategies, resources and supports necessary to achieve those goals.

An IEP may usefully be thought of as a product. However, there is also a process involved in developing the plan and it is the quality of this process that determines the quality and effectiveness of the Plan. The Individual Education Plan is developed through a collaborative process involving the school, parents, the student (where appropriate) and other relevant personnel or agencies. It refers to the adapted or modified aspects of the educational programme and focuses on priority learning needs, although the student may also have other learning needs that will not require the same intensive degree of planning and monitoring.

Not every aspect of the curriculum and school life needs to be modified for every student with special educational needs - only those areas of identified need arising from assessment should be covered. The amount of adaptation and support will vary according to the individual learning needs of each student. Some students with more complex needs may require significant educational modifications.

## Why have an IEP?

Planning for individual learning needs has been a feature of special educational provision for some time. However, this approach was often fragmented and, to date was not standard practice in all schools. The requirement to develop formalised IEPs is an essential component of the EPSEN Act, 2004.

An IEP:

- Allows the student to progress at a level commensurate with ability
- Involves collaboration between all partners
- Focuses teaching strategies
- Ensures records are kept



## IEP Principles

The IEP is a working document and should be useful, available and comprehensible to all those dealing directly with the student. It needs to be considered in the context of home, school and classroom organisation.

Effective individual education plans have key characteristics.

These are:

- Individualised and child-centred
- Inclusive
- Holistic
- Collaborative
- Accessible.

### Sources of information

Home, school and community are important sources of information about the child with special educational needs. The child concerned is likely also to have contact with a number of professionals who will have assessed her/his strengths and needs formally and/or informally.

- Parents:

Provide a perspective on their children that is different from that of the professionals involved with the child. In the case of the pre-school child, parents are the source of vital information about the child's developmental history. Parents can often provide valuable information about the child's medical history/requirements, educational history, strengths and gifts and emotional and social needs.

– Student:

Students themselves, particularly if older, can be an important source of information about, for example, their learning style, interests, what they like to learn about, what interferes with learning for them and what helps them learn.

– School:

The child's class teacher and former teachers are a central source of information about the child's strengths/needs, interests, specific difficulties across curricular areas as well as the programmes and strategies that have been successfully implemented with the child. Teachers can provide details about educational interventions; they can also provide comparative information/data which demonstrate a child's performance relative to other children of the same age/class. Information from school records and school personnel may also provide a profile of a child's social and emotional development.

– Other Professionals:

The range of professionals consulted in relation to a child's educational programme may vary as appropriate. The information provided by such professionals may include: information about the child's medical needs, physical or sensory development, cognitive functioning, emotional and/or behavioural development, speech and language, communication, hearing and/or vision. Information gathered from these professionals can help determine the child's strengths and needs across a range of functioning.

# Individual Behaviour Support Plan (IBSP)

## **Behaviour Support Plan (BSP)**

Functional assessment data is used to develop an effective and appropriate behaviour change programme outlined in the BSP. The BSP includes; identification of the target behaviour(s) for reduction, the hypothesised function(s) of behaviour, procedures to reduce the motivation to exhibit the behaviour, identification of replacement behaviours to teach, procedures for the management of problem behaviour, schedules of reinforcement and data collection procedures.

Every member of the school community has a role to play in the development and implementation of the BSP. School staff work closely with parents and external professionals and in exceptional circumstances and where deemed appropriate and suitable, the School will engage with parents in the management of behaviours in the home. Speech and Language and Occupational Therapy (where appropriate) staff will also be involved to ensure the delivery of an eclectic approach. The implementation of all plans is in compliance with the ethical guidelines for best practice (specified by the Behaviour Analyst Certification Board). On-going data collection and analysis are employed to track the successful progress of the strategies within the plan. Regular reviews are conducted with the behaviour analyst, specialist staff and parents.

## Language and Communication Literacy

Pupils with ASD exhibit significant social communication and language difficulties. Appropriate communication and social skills are necessary in order to express needs, desires, and feelings. Language and communication are the foundations for the development of relationships, participating in society and accessing the curriculum. It is therefore crucial to develop skills in these areas in order to improve pupils' quality of life. For this reason, Stepping Stones places greater emphasis upon receptive and expressive communication (speaking and listening) within English, making this area of the curriculum, one of our Core Curriculum Areas.

The term 'communication' embraces verbal and non-verbal methods of receiving and giving information, essential when catering for students for whom verbal communication may not be an option. Language enables the students to engage socially initially within the family, school and later in the wider world. It enables the students to give expression to their feelings, ideas & concerns. We in Stepping Stones School believe that the ability to gain control over the environment opens up a world of opportunity for the student.

The English curriculum is designed to offer children a language experience, which integrates oral language, reading, and writing. The English Curriculum notes that language is crucial in the learning process. Children learn about language, and they also learn through language.

At Stepping Stones School each child is unique and this is foremost in our thoughts when developing & creating Language & Communication programmes for our students. We endeavour to teach Language and Communication skills in a structured way, which is appropriate to our students individual abilities. Language and Communication Literacy

## Mathematics

Mathematics education provides the child with a wide range of knowledge, skills and related activities that help him/her to develop an understanding of the physical world and social interactions. Maths education fosters creative and aesthetic development and enhances the growth of reasoning through the investigative techniques in the mathematical context. Given the needs of students with a diagnosis of Autism we at Stepping Stones School have identified Mathematics to be one of our Core Curricular subjects.

We aim to provide students with a mathematical education that is developmentally appropriate and socially relevant. Through the mathematics curriculum we aim to improve the students understanding of the environment, to increase his/her interest in it and their ability to interact with it. While some of our student may not be able to express themselves verbally they will need to hear verbal descriptions of what they are discovering as they discover it. The child's mathematical development requires a substantial amount of practical experience to establish and to reinforce concepts and to develop a facility for their everyday use in the classroom and out in the community.

## Social, Personal & Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships & Sexual Education (RSE)

SPHE, by its very nature, is an integral part of the student's daily life. However, while much of the teaching in SPHE can be done informally throughout the school day, the Primary School Curriculum advises that learning is best facilitated in a combination of three ways:

- in a positive school climate and atmosphere,
- through discrete time (a specific time on the timetable)
- through an integrated approach throughout a range of subject areas.

SPHE enables the student to develop the skills necessary for managing his/her life to the best of his/her ability, personally and socially. The age and stage of development of the student will be important factors in determining the emphasis of each student's scheme of work.

SPHE is intrinsic to all areas of the curriculum and to every facet of the student's life. Issues cannot be explored in isolation, but must be seen as part of the daily experience of the student. Every opportunity should be taken to place learning in its functional context. Students should be enabled to understand and use language appropriate to particular situations.

RSE is an integral part of SPHE and must be taught in this context. It provides structured opportunities to pupils to acquire knowledge and understanding of human sexuality and relationships through processes which will enable pupils to form values and establish behaviours within a moral, spiritual and social framework.

Central to RSE is the fostering of self-esteem, through which the pupil becomes more aware in making choices and decisions in all aspects of life and particularly in those

relating to sexuality and relationships. Research shows that pupils who do not have an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) can see 'the bigger picture' but those on the spectrum present and have difficulties on:

- Knowing the social rules governing touching of self and others.
- Inhibiting urges and impulses
- 'getting to know' a person
- Understanding about 'dual consent' and the right to say 'NO'.

Therefore, when planning a RSE programme, it should be taking into consideration the extent to which the content is treated which will be dependent on the emotional and intellectual maturity of the children. Thus a degree of flexibility is advisable.

SPHE and RSE help all pupils develop as individuals in a wider society. Pupils learn to understand themselves physically, emotionally, socially and sexually and to understand their relationships with others.

## Stay Safe

The Stay Safe program is a primary school based approach to the prevention of child abuse. The aim of the programme is to reduce vulnerability to child abuse and bullying through the provision of a personal safety education programme for children. The Stay Safe programme itself is a personal safety skills programme designed for use with primary school children. The programme seeks to enhance children's self-protective skills by participation in lessons on safe and unsafe situations, bullying, inappropriate touch, secrets, telling and stranger danger. The programme aims to give children the skills necessary to enable them to recognise and resist abuse/victimisation and teaches them that they should always tell (an adult that can help) about any situation which they find unsafe, upsetting, threatening, dangerous or abusive.

## ICT

At Stepping Stones we see ICT as being integral in teaching all areas of the Curriculum and in meeting the needs as presented by our students. ICT have features which appeal to students with ASD as they provide a secure learning environment which remain stable and predictable. ICT allows our students to develop their communication and literacy skills. It aids the student in communicating with others, and provides structured skill practice which supports basic literacy and numeracy. ICT also provides opportunities for engaging in meaningful leisure activities and can encourage creativity. At Stepping Stones, students have access to laptops, iPads, iPods, whiteboards and our computer room. We also regularly review the software available so our students can access the curriculum more easily.



## Extra-curricular Activities

The bulk of the available research would seem to strongly indicate that students who participate in any form of extra-curricular activities benefit from enhanced status amongst peers, a wider social network, and an early understanding of several crucial 'life skills'.

At Stepping Stones we offer our pupils a creative curriculum that includes opportunities to gain the skills necessary for participation in the community. We also seek to make learning experiences as concrete as possible so that our pupils can learn and make sense of their world. As part of this we ensure that all pupils take part in regular school trips. We have a minibus to enable us to explore further afield.

The potential self-esteem gains to be made from these outcomes can lead to improvements in other areas and can in many cases act as a deterrent to challenging behaviour.

We offer Yoga, Drama and we also participate in a Football League with other Special schools.

## Integration

Section 2 of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 requires that:

“A child with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs unless the nature or degree of those needs of the child is such that to do so would be inconsistent with:

The best interests of the child as determined in accordance with any assessment carried out under this Act

The effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated.”  
(<http://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Special-education>)

Integration is an important part of Stepping Stones SPHE curriculum covering the strand and strand areas:

- Myself                                      Self identity  
   Safety and protection
- Myself and others                      My friends and other people  
   Relating to others
- Myself and the wider world        Developing citizenship

Our senior students integrate with students from the transition year class in Scoil Dara in Kilcock once a month, practising conversation skills, turn taking and social interaction in a different setting. They also generalise the use of their Maths, Language and Communication and SPHE skills. Reverse integration also takes place throughout the year where the students from Scoil Dara come to visit Stepping Stones to take part in group activities like P.E, Cooking, Art etc.



# **Stepping Stones**

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