



St Aidan's CE High School



Learning Support Dept

Additional Information for Parents
2020 - 2021

St Aidan's Learning Support Department 2020 - 2021

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Introduction

As a school we firmly believe that each child, regardless of academic or physical difficulties, has the right to take part in and enjoy every aspect of school life. As a department, we feel that our everyday work supports this belief. Each student is an individual and when catering for each child's needs, individual personalities, strengths and preferences are taken into account as much as possible. The department can only achieve success by working in close partnership with parents, staff and students; therefore, it has an 'open door' policy whereby parents are welcome to arrange to come into school in order to discuss concerns / complaints at an early stage. At this early stage, concerns can usually be resolved by communicating with the relevant staff members. If the problem is more complex, it may be that a further meeting is arranged involving teaching staff, Heads of Year or outside agencies if appropriate.

The Learning Support department is based around five small classrooms / study areas, containing study cubicles for independent study and a purpose-built, fitted kitchen to help students with life skills. Two of the classrooms accommodate students studying within our Foundation Learning Programme, an alternative curriculum for students who are unable to access the majority of mainstream lessons. However, all students in the Foundation Learning Programme are expected to attend some practical mainstream lessons if possible.



1. The Department

The department is made up subject specialist teaching staff who teach small Learning Support groups. These groups run for English, Maths, Science, History, Geography, RS and French and the teaching staff alternate each year. We have a large number of General Teaching Assistants (GTAs), Advanced Teaching

Assistants (ATAs) and Foundation Tutors who teach within the Foundation Group (see below). Teaching Assistants mainly support within the classroom under the direction of the classroom teacher but occasionally they support students who are withdrawn from specific lessons. The department is led by Mrs Rowland with the assistance of Miss Chanter. Miss Chanter's main responsibility is testing for access arrangements for public examinations.

In Years 7, a small number of students are placed in smaller learning support groups in order to receive more attention and to allow more time for the repetition and reinforcement of new concepts. They are stretched and challenged within the groups, taking the same end of year examinations as the rest of their year group. In Years 10 and 11, a very small number of students may be withdrawn from an option subject in order to have support in preparing for GCSE examinations.

For a very small number of students with very low learning levels, we provide a Foundation Learning Programme which delivers a highly personalised curriculum to mixed-age classes. This provision is for students who are unable to access mainstream lessons or study GCSE (or equivalent) examinations.

Students who are in receipt of an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan are usually supported by a Teaching Assistant for some of their timetable. The nature of that support varies depending on the needs of the child; however, we discourage all teaching assistants from sitting next to students in the classroom (unless there are specific reasons for being in close proximity). Staff are very aware of the need to prevent students from becoming over-reliant on classroom helpers. The long-term aim for all students, regardless of the nature of their difficulties, is to maximise their ability to work independently.



2. Identifying Needs

To ensure that we meet the needs of students coming into St Aidan's, we need to gather as much information as we can before and when they arrive. This is a detailed process which is broken down into stages:

- 1 Mr Taylor (Head of Year 7), Mrs Douglas (Head of KS3) or myself visit primary schools so we can look at transition arrangements to help vulnerable students settle into Year 7.
- 2 While the students are still in Year 6, the school holds an information-gathering Parents' Evening, at which parents of all pupils about to enter Year 7 are given an appointment to talk through the individual details regarding their child. This includes information about any history of Special Educational Needs and any medical conditions. Any relevant information provided by parents on this evening with regard to Special Education Needs is passed on to teaching staff so teachers are aware of individual needs right at the start of the year.
- 3 All students are invited to visit the school for a full day prior to attending in Year 7. It is intended to be a taster day which we hope they will enjoy, though students may also be assessed on that day so we can start to plan Maths groupings in preparation for the start of Year 7. In some cases (where pupils do not know anyone else who will be going to St Aidan's) students attend for an extra half day. In addition, a small number of students who are going to need a high level of support may visit the school individually with their Teaching Assistant to receive a guided tour from a member of the Learning Support Department.
- 4 Within a fortnight of their arrival in September, all students are assessed on their reading, writing and mathematical skills. These tests are for screening purposes so the results are not generally disclosed to parents. However, parents are welcome to contact the school if they wish to know the results of the tests. For this assessment the following tests are used:

New Group Reading Test (NGRT)

This is a reading comprehension test, which means the student has to understand the words, not just read them. Parents are sometimes concerned that their child has come out with a lower score in reading than at primary school but it could be that previous reading tests were not reading *comprehension* tests, merely reading *accuracy* tests (simply reading without testing understanding). Results come in the form of a reading age and a standardised score which enables us to take age into account.

Vernon Graded Word Spelling Test

This tells us of a pupil's spelling ability and again, results come in the form of a spelling age and a standardised score.



MIDYIS

This is a test which provides us with additional data to enable us to monitor progress more effectively. It is delivered in one hour but consists of a number of sub-tests such as Vocabulary, Maths, Skills (Processing / Proof-reading) and Non-verbal ability. This test is now taken on the Year 6 visit in July.

3. Allocation of Resources

The department has a range of software to assist learners with literacy, for example, *Clicker 6* and the *Lexia* literacy programme. Students in the English Learning Support groups work through the Lexia programme in English lessons as well as having access at home.

The use of resources is also determined by the nature of the difficulty being addressed; a child's EHC Plan may identify access to a specific equipment which the school may have to purchase. This obviously varies as new students with different needs enter the school; for example, software which adapts reading texts so they are modified for use with visually impaired students.



4. Curriculum Arrangements

Students who score below a certain reading age or are struggling to cope in larger groups, are placed within small Learning Support groups of about 11 students. Generally, if a student is in the English Learning Support group, they are also in the small groups for other high literacy subjects (History, Geography, Religious Studies, French and Science) though one or two students just move into the small group for English. In Maths, the whole year group are grouped by ability when they start in September.

These groups provide a more individual response to students' difficulties than the larger mainstream classes and, with the exception of English, study the same topics as the other classes but at a more accessible level. In the small English groups, there is a greater emphasis on basic skills such as reading comprehension and spelling. Once the groups are formed, the Learning Support department invites parents of students in the Learning Support groups to a literacy and numeracy evening where they can get advice on how to help their children at home.

The Learning Support groups are monitored and anyone who we feel is making significant progress may move back to mainstream classes. Likewise, students who were not initially selected through the screening process but who are struggling in mainstream classes can move into Learning Support groups as the year progresses.

Assistance with help is available at lunchtime in the Learning Support dept for any students who are having difficulty completing homework tasks. There is also a Games Club which runs for students in Years 7 and 8 who are particularly vulnerable or struggle with friendships. We have introduced a number of computer-free lunchtimes for Games Club, to encourage students to interact with each other through group activities such as board games, a selection of craft activities and Film Club on Fridays.

For students in Years 10 and 11, there is the option of taking a Core and Future Key Skills course which provides additional help for students studying GCSE English and Maths. Alternatively, there is a Personal Development ASDAN programme which covers a variety of topics linked with personal development such as communication and employability skills and incorporates a range of practical experiences. The ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) scheme is highly regarded by Further and Higher Education institutes and in order to take the course, students have a slightly reduced timetable, which disapples them from studying a foreign language at Key Stage 4.

5. Implementing the SEND Code of Practice

Our school's Local Offer (a legal requirement which outlines the provision we make in school for all students) is published on the school's website. There is an increased focus on Quality First Teaching (also called Wave One Provision), which are the strategies adopted by the classroom teachers in order to accommodate the needs of all the learners in their lessons.



Students with more complex learning difficulties (normally requiring EHCPs) have an Individual Provision Map (IPM), which gives teachers detailed information to enable these students to access the curriculum. Though these contain one or two generic targets, most student targets are set by individual subject teachers and through review meetings. The department also runs a programme called *Get Organised!* which is designed to help nominated students with the organisation of their work and equipment. The club takes place before or during registration.

Teachers may discuss any students in school with the Learning Support department, if they feel they would benefit from more specific strategies or support. Both teachers and Teaching Assistants are very good at informing myself or Heads of Year of any problems which may not have been picked up in the initial screening tests or may have only recently developed. The department also liaises regularly with a wide range of outside agencies such as the Sensory and Physical Support Service (for students with physical, visual and hearing impairments), EMS (Autism Outreach Service) and has an excellent Careers Department within school with staff who are very knowledgeable about a variety of Post-16 pathways.

Conclusion

Effective and regular communication with parents is a key ingredient for the success of the department and we welcome any queries you may have. If you would like to get in touch, please do not hesitate to contact me on the school number (01423-885814) or mail me directly on j.rowland@staidans.co.uk.



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