

Coláiste Choilm Tullamore



Special Educational Needs Policy

May 2018

(Draft for consultation)

Policy context

This Special Educational Needs policy has been formulated in compliance with the Education Act (1998), Education (Welfare) Act (2000), Equal Status Acts (2000 to 2011), Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) (2004) and Disability Act (2005) to contribute to the realisation of our mission statement;

“To provide a caring Christian Education, in a community of pupils, staff, parents and management, where each individual is valued as a unique human being.”

It draws heavily upon Circular No 0014/2017 entitled “Special Education Teaching Allocation” (DES, 2017a) and the “Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools: Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools” (DES, 2017b). In particular, the aim of special education at Coláiste Choilm Tullamore is to educate students with special educational needs in an inclusive environment and to assist them to leave school with the skills necessary to participate to their full potential in an inclusive way in the social and economic activities of society and to live independent and fulfilled lives. In connection, the term “Special Educational Needs” means, in relation to a person;

“a restriction in the capacity of a person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition” (Government of Ireland, 2004, p. 6).

Effective provision for students identified as having special educational needs is situated within an inclusive whole-school framework which emphasises both effective teaching and learning for all and good collaboration between the school, parents/guardians and students.

1. Child protection procedures

This Special Educational Needs policy shall be implemented in compliance with current legislation, circulars and procedures issued by the Department of Education and Skills and school policies and procedures relating to Child Protection.

2. Admission of students

The Admissions Policy at Coláiste Choilm, Tullamore makes specific reference to catering for students with special educational needs.

3. Organisation of students

The allocation of students to classes at Coláiste Choilm, Tullamore within each year group is primarily based on the random, as opposed to hierarchical, allocation of students to classes. Accordingly, in line with the principles of inclusive education, classes predominantly comprise 'mixed ability' groupings. Hence, students benefit from 'mixed-ability' teaching which has beneficial effects for all students and helps promote social and personal development. In connection, students are set for classes in Mathematics from September in second year, Irish from third year and English at Leaving Certificate level.

4. Special Education Teaching Resources

4.1 Physical resources

Coláiste Choilm Tullamore is very well resourced to meet the special educational needs of its students through the Learning Support room. This room is both centrally and visibly located within the school building reflecting the provision of associated support as a normal inherent part of the education of students at the school. The room is equipped with computers and concomitant reading and comprehension resources. This enables the school to address the special educational needs of its students through a blend of within class support for and withdrawal of students, as appropriate to the needs of each student.

4.2 School personnel

Coláiste Choilm Tullamore is allocated teaching support under the new model for allocating Special Education Teachers (DES, 2017a) to schools which allows the school to plan in advance of the school year. Accordingly, in May of each academic year, the Principal informs the Special Education Coordinator of the number of hours available for the Special Education coordinator to allocate to Special Education

teachers for the following academic year to meet the needs of students identified as having special educational needs (This is contingent on advance confirmation by the Department of Education and Skills of the number of hours of Special Education resources being allocated to the school for the following academic year). Subsequently, these resources are allocated to Special Education Teachers based on the individual needs of students and in accordance with this policy to ensure the special educational and learning support needs of students in the school are met. These allocations are recorded in the “School Provision Plan for students with special educational needs” for Coláiste Choilm Tullamore.

4.3 Outside agencies

In meeting the special educational needs of its students, Coláiste Choilm Tullamore draws on support from relevant outside agencies including the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), a Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO), The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Support Service, The Inspectorate and allied health professionals, as appropriate. The school has established procedures for liaising with these services and bodies in order to optimise the quality of provision for students with special educational needs at the individual, group and whole school level.

4.4 Deployment of Special Education teaching resources

Special education teaching resources are deployed in an optimum manner at Coláiste Choilm Tullamore to improve both the learning experiences of and educational outcomes for students identified as having special educational needs. In deploying special education resources, the over-riding principle is that these resources are deployed to address identified needs of students whilst ensuring those with the highest level of need have access to the greatest level of support. Accordingly;

- Learning support and resource teaching is allocated to students in line with their needs whilst ensuring that those with the greatest need receive the highest level of support. This model of support is based on the students’ needs and is informed by regular reviews of progress and ongoing consultation.

- Additional Special Educational Teaching Supports allocated to Coláiste Choilm Tullamore should be used in their entirety to support students identified as having special educational needs, learning support needs, and additional literacy such as English Additional Language Support.
- The special educational needs of students are cross-referenced so that common needs can be met through a blend of within class support, small group and individual support to ensure effective and efficient teaching and learning approaches.
- The deployment of additional Special Education Teaching resources to the conducting of co-ordination activities required to ensure the most effective and optimal use of the time allocated is an integral part of the allocation of such resources at Coláiste Choilm Tullamore.
- Additional special educational needs supports are tailored to meet the unique needs of students, addressing social, emotional as well as literacy and mathematical needs. The supports address the specific needs of the students following consultation with relevant teachers, parents, professionals as necessary and the students themselves.

4.5 Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

All teachers have responsibility for teaching students with special educational needs. Consequently, it is important that all staff members engage in appropriate Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to develop the capacity of the school to meet the educational needs of all students.

In compliance with policy set out in the Strategic Development Plan at Coláiste Choilm Tullamore the ongoing professional development needs of staff are reviewed on a regular basis with reference to the provision of quality teaching and learning in both the mainstream classrooms and special educational settings. This also includes CPD for educational leaders at the school in regard to developing an inclusive whole-school approach to special educational needs provision.

5. Continuum of support

At Coláiste Choilm Tullamore, a continuum of support process which uses a problem-solving model to determine the special educational needs of students, devise appropriate interventions to meet these needs and review their implementation is employed. These needs can include academic, social and emotional needs, as well as needs associated with physical, sensory, language and communication difficulties. The levels of intervention inherent to this continuum of support are illustrated in Figure. 1 below.

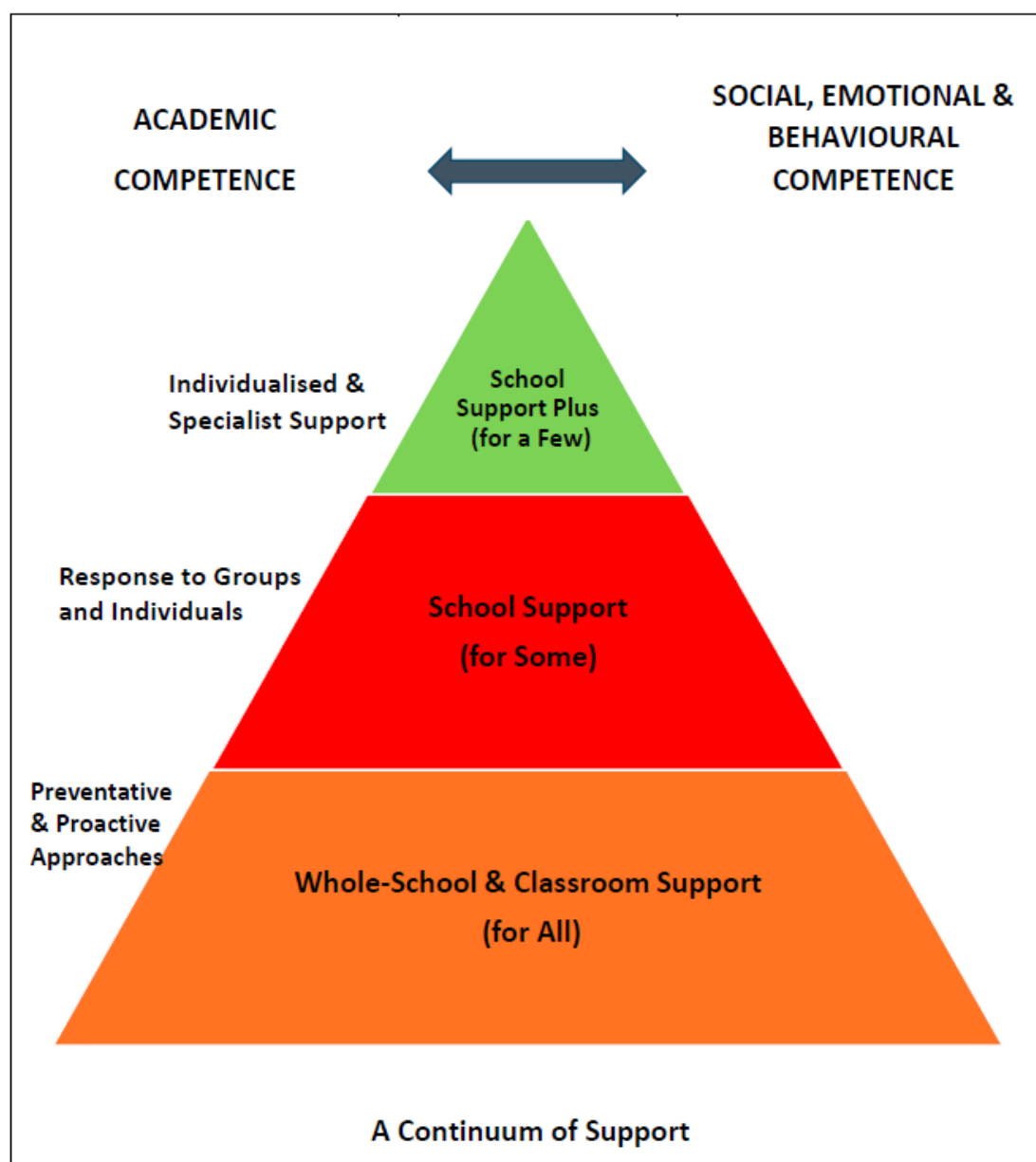


Fig. 1 A Continuum of Support (Reproduced from (DES, 2017b, p. 9))

Arising from the implementation of the continuum of support, the special educational needs of the majority of students within a mainstream class are met by differentiating teaching approaches, constituting *Support for All*. Additionally, some students are supported in their classes with additional special education teachers providing within class support, namely *School Support (for Some)*. Furthermore, some students may be withdrawn on an individual or small group basis for intensive teaching of skills, that is *School Support Plus (for a Few)*. Hence the model of support embraces the three distinct school-based processes comprising Support for All, Support for Some and Support for a Few. *The principle of providing students with the greatest levels of need access to the greatest level of support underpins the implementation of this continuum of support* and the level of support individual students receive varies as they move along the continuum.

Furthermore, in implementing the continuum of support, the school adopts a three-step process to meeting the needs of students with special educational needs. These involve:

- (i) The identification of students who have special educational needs.
- (ii) Interventions for students identified as having special educational needs.
- (iii) Monitoring of outcomes for students identified as having special educational needs.

The abovementioned three steps are elaborated upon in sections 7, 8 and 9 that follow, respectively.

6. Identification of students who have special educational needs

6.1 Identification of existing students at the school for support.

In identifying students for support, the school takes into account the following:

- Standardised tests are used to screen and identify students' performance in reading and maths. Those students performing below 10th percentile are prioritised for support in literacy and numeracy.
- Students who were previously in receipt of supplementary teaching and who continue to have learning difficulties.

- Students who are identified as having significant needs through a process of ongoing assessment and intervention as set out in the Continuum of Support Process (DES, 2007b).
- Students with mild or transient educational needs including those associated with speech and language difficulties, social or emotional problems, or co-ordination or attention control difficulties and students who have specific learning disabilities.
- Students with significant Special Educational Needs such as those identified as having significant learning, behavioural, emotional, physical and sensory needs.
- The needs of students who may present with a range of learning whose interaction may present a significant barrier to the students' learning and ability to access the curriculum.
- Students who have additional literacy or language learning needs including those students who need additional English as an Additional Language Support.

6.2 Identification of incoming first year students for support

In identifying incoming first year students for support, the school takes into account the following:

- An assessment day is held for incoming first year students in January during which each of these students completes the Cognitive Abilities Test (CAT4).
- Primary schools are visited in April each year to obtain relevant information about enrolled students to ensure these students experience a smooth transition to secondary school.
- Each primary school is informed when any student attending such a school has been enrolled at Coláiste Choilm Tullamore for the following school year and requested to transfer relevant educational passports and other information that may be deemed appropriate to the latter.
- The Principal meets the parent(s)/guardian(s) of incoming first year students in June where any concerns relating to a student can be discussed.

- Where a special educational need is identified, the school conducts special needs case meetings in person and/or over the phone with the parent(s)/guardian(s), Principal and Learning Support teacher, as appropriate.
- Copies of any relevant psychological reports and assessment results are sought to inform the identification process.
- The Learning Support coordinator administers the General Reading Test, GRT2 to identify the reading ages of the group.
- The results of the CAT4 and GRT2 tests are analysed. This analysis combined with available assessment test results, information from parents and feeder primary schools and parents & guardians form the basis for prioritising students for support.

7. Interventions for students identified as having special educational needs

A whole-school approach to meeting the needs of students identified as having special educational needs is adopted at Coláiste Choilm Tullamore. In connection:

- The special educational needs of the majority of students within a mainstream class are met by differentiating teaching approaches (Support for All).
- Where students continue to present with significant difficulties, despite whole-school interventions (such as differentiated teaching, a mentoring programme or social skills group), School Support (for Some) is initiated.
- At the level of Support for Some, educational support plans are devised and implemented for students identified as having special educational needs, as appropriate. These are differentiated in line with the individual needs of students and include clear, measurable learning targets, and specify the resources and targeted interventions that are used to address student needs in line with the continuum of support process.
- Individualised educational support plans for students are developed on an informed basis through a collaborative process involving relevant teachers, parents/guardians, the students themselves and outside professionals, as necessary.

- Support for Some can take the form of an addition teacher providing within class support and small group and individual withdrawal.
- In circumstances where meeting the special educational needs of students requires more than Support for Some, School Support Plus (for a Few) is initiated.
- At the level of School Support Plus (for a Few), subject teacher(s), parents/guardians and special education teachers, in collaboration with outside agencies, as required, engage in a more detailed and systematic approach to information gathering and assessment. This involves using a broad range of formal and informal assessment and diagnostic tools, including teacher observation, student interview, measures of cognitive ability and social, emotional, behavioural and adaptive functioning, as appropriate.
- Data generated from the initiation of School Support Plus (for a Few) is used to devise and implement a Support Plan to meet the needs of the associated student. This data also serves as a baseline against which to map progress. A Support Plan at this level is more detailed, individualised, and involves longer term planning and consultation than those at other levels of support.
- The school applies for “Reasonable Accommodations at the Certificate Examinations” for students identified as having special educational needs, as appropriate.

8. Monitoring of outcomes for students identified as having special educational needs

To optimise the implementation of interventions, supports provided to students identified as having special educational needs are informed by a tracking and recording system. Specifically:

- Student Support Plans specify time-frames for review. These reviews are implemented in consultation with the subject teacher, special education teachers, parents/guardians, the student and relevant professionals, as appropriate.
- The review of Support Plans takes place on a regular basis and allows subsequent plans to be tailored to the individual needs of students in line with their

developmental level. This may result in a decision to discontinue support, to continue the same level of support, or move to a higher or lower level of support.

- A Student Support File which includes Support Plan and Support Review Record is maintained for students identified as having special educational needs, as appropriate.
- In addition to monitoring outcomes at the individual level, reviews of outcomes at group, class and whole-school level are also conducted to inform subsequent planning at group and individual levels.

The implementation of the above tracking and recording system ensures that the progress of all students in meeting their identified targets is monitored at the Support for All, School Support (for Some) and School Support Plus (for a Few) levels of the continuum of support.

To support students with special educational needs effectively in the school and to ensure consistency of approach, all teachers (including subject teachers, special education teachers and the guidance counsellor) have access to relevant information from student support plans, in accordance with data protection legislation. This helps teachers to differentiate their subject teaching to meet the needs of their students, and to set specific targets related to their subject areas.

9. Timetabling

The effective use of resources is dependent upon effective timetabling practices that ensure continuity and avoid undue fragmentation of provision. In matters pertaining to the timetabling of additional special education teaching supports, the over-riding principle is that resources are deployed to address identified needs of students. Importantly, those with the highest level of need should have access to the greatest level of support. Specifically:

- A core team of teachers should be allocated timetables dedicated to special education duties. This should be maintained in order to provide greater stability and continuity of support (avoiding a student having several different teachers).
- A flexible approach to timetabling should be adopted to ensure that extra capacity is available to address changing needs during the year. Accordingly,

some members of the special education team may be allocated flexible timetables with inbuilt capacity to respond to additional needs.

- The overall school timetable should be designed carefully to make appropriate provision for students with special educational needs.
- Members of the special education support team should be consulted when the timetable is being developed.
- To provide stability and continuity of support, specific provisions should be made in advance of the school year for special education teachers to meet the needs of students identified as having special educational needs through within class support for and withdrawal of these students. The former should be included in the school timetable as Within Class Special Education Support (WCSS) with the latter being referenced as Withdrawal Special Education Support (WSS). Further, the latter should take account of the impact of withdrawal on students' access to the curriculum with their year groups.

10. Roles and responsibilities of school personnel

10.1 Board of Management

- The Board of management has the responsibility for overseeing the development, implementation and review of school policies and services in relation to the inclusion of students with special educational needs.

10.2 The Principal

“Under current legislation the principal of the school has overall responsibility for ensuring that the special educational needs of students are met. As a consequence, the principal has the general responsibility for establishing and promoting whole-school policies and procedures that are supportive of the learning of all students, including those with special educational needs” (DES, 2007a, p. 67).

More specifically the role of the school principal includes the following:

- Assume overall responsibility for the development and implementation of the school's policies and procedures relating to the inclusion of students with special educational needs.

- Oversee a whole-school approach to assessment and screening to identify needs and to guide the allocation of appropriate supports.
- Ensure effective engagement with feeder primary schools to support the transition of students with special educational needs.
- In collaboration with the in-school management team, discharge a key function in the deployment of staff, allocation of resources, organisation of students and timetabling.
- Ensure the additional Special Educational Teaching Supports allocated to Coláiste Choilm Tullamore are used in their entirety to support students identified as having special educational needs, learning support needs, and additional literacy such as English Additional Language Support.
- Liaise with the Board of Management, Parents' Council and Student Council to enable the Special Education Coordinator to present to these partners on matters pertaining to Special Education at the request of any of these parties, as appropriate.
- Ensure that systems are in place for effective sharing of relevant information on students' needs with all subject teachers.
- Facilitate the continuing professional development of all teachers in relation to the education of students with special educational needs, and ensure that all school staff (subject teachers and special education teachers, guidance counsellors, special needs assistants) are clear regarding their roles and responsibilities in this area.
- Ensure that whole-school procedures are established to facilitate the effective involvement of parents, students and external professionals/agencies.
- Giving careful consideration to the formation of a special education needs team whose members have expertise and interest in special education so that provision can be coordinated efficiently and flexibly to meet a range of needs.

Subject to his/her overall statutory responsibilities, the principal may delegate the performance of specific responsibilities to other staff members, including members of the special education needs team.

10.3 The Deputy Principal

- The role of the Deputy Principal includes working with the Principal in establishing and promoting whole school policies and procedures that are supportive of the learning of all students, including those identified as having special educational needs.
- The role of the Deputy Principal may involve assuming authority and responsibility delegated by the Principal to work and liaise with other members of staff, parents and agencies to address the needs of students identified as having special educational needs.

10.4 Subject teachers

Research has consistently shown that the quality of teaching is the most critical factor in enhancing students' learning and educational experiences. In connection,

- The subject teacher is responsible for educating all students in his/her class, including any student identified as having special educational needs.
- Each subject teacher is primarily responsible for the progress and care of all students in his/her classroom, including students identified as having special educational needs.
- It is the responsibility of the subject teacher to ensure that each student in his/her class is taught in a stimulating and supportive classroom environment where all students are respected and valued.
- The subject teacher in consultation with the relevant special education teacher(s) will consider ways in which the curriculum will be differentiated and/or otherwise adapted to suit the needs of individual students. This may involve identifying the most appropriate teaching strategies and programmes to meet the students' needs.

10.5 Special Education needs team

A core team of teachers with responsibility for special educational needs should be established and maintained at Coláiste Choilm Tullamore. It should include the principal and/or deputy principal, guidance counsellor, special education coordinator

and special education teachers, as appropriate. Members of this team should have the necessary experience and ongoing access to professional development to support the diverse needs of students. The role of the Special Education needs team is to:

- Help ensure that those students with the greatest level of special educational need have access to support from teachers with the necessary experience and expertise.
- Develop, implement and monitor a whole-school approach to the education of students with special educational needs. This involves developing whole-school procedures for the selection of students for supplementary teaching, assisting in the implementation of whole-school strategies to enhance teaching and learning, and providing guidance to colleagues on the implementation of students' support plans.
- Work closely with subject teachers, parents and with other support structures within the school, such as the student support team and guidance counsellor.
- Provide valuable support to subject teachers to meet student needs within their classroom and subject areas.
- Work closely with class teachers to provide additional teaching support for students identified as having special educational needs, as appropriate. All additional teaching support is provided to build on and complement the support planned and delivered by the subject teacher.
- Be familiar with a wide range of teaching approaches, methodologies and resources to cater for particular learning preferences and to meet a variety of needs. Teaching approaches could include a combination of within class teaching support, early intervention, small group and/or individual support.
- Plan their interventions carefully to address students' priority learning needs and to achieve the targets identified in the relevant Student Support Plan, in consultation with subject teachers.
- Routinely assess the outcomes for students, record them and use them to review progress. These outcomes should also be used to inform the targets for the next phase of intervention.

10.6 The Special Education Coordinator

The Special Education allocation includes provision for the conducting of planning and co-ordination activities required to ensure the most effective and optimal use of the special educational needs hours provided to schools, for children. In connection the school has a Special Education coordinator who, subject to the direction of the principal, assumes responsibility for co-ordinating overall provision for special educational needs within the school. The role of this Special Education coordinator is to:

- Co-ordinate data gathering, screening and testing relating to the special educational needs of students.
- Plan for the transition of students identified as having special educational needs to and from post primary school.
- Provide the principal, in May, with a list of requirements to have accommodated in the following year's school timetable to meet the needs of students identified as having special educational needs, as appropriate.
- Take a lead role in making arrangements for planning, implementation and review of student support plans.
- Support the communication of information regarding students' needs to subject teachers and Year-Heads.
- Liaise with other agencies, NEPS and allied health professionals.
- Liaise with parents and students.
- Liaise with the Principal to present to the board of management, Parents' Council and Student Council on matters pertaining to Special Education, as appropriate.

10.7 Year Heads

Year heads facilitate the inclusion of an individual student with special educational needs by monitoring the students' progress within the year group.

10.8 The Guidance Counsellor

The guidance counsellor should be a member of the Special Education needs team to help in promoting the inclusion of students identified as having special educational needs.

Student Support Team

The Student Support Team serves an important preventative and early-intervention function, particularly in relation to addressing the needs of students with social, emotional, behavioural and well-being needs. The Student Support team coordinator should liaise with the Learning Support coordinator to ensure appropriate interventions are put in place to meet the special educational needs of students, as appropriate.

10.9 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)

To follow.

10.10 Parental/guardian engagement

Good parental/guardian engagement is a critical factor in enhancing outcomes for students with special educational needs. Accordingly, parents/guardians are consulted in relation to their children's needs and strengths and on the supports and strategies being developed to support their children, and are also involved in regular reviews of progress.

In addition to consultation around the individual needs of their child, parents/guardians also receive information on the nature and type of the special educational needs provision available at the school. They are also consulted in the development and review of policies relating to the education of children with special educational needs as part of the school's policy for the cyclical review of all school policies.

10.11 Student engagement

Good engagement and participation in their own education has many associated benefits for students. This is particularly important for students with special educational needs and can help enhance their academic and social and emotional outcomes. Accordingly, the school listens to and builds on students' interests, aspirations and strengths when developing educational interventions. This involves actively including students in a shared assessment for learning process, setting shared learning objectives, and jointly reviewing progress.

11. Ratification of policy

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on _____.

Signed: _____ Date: _____
(Chairperson of Board of Management)

Signed: _____ Date: _____
(Principal)

12. Review of policy

This Special Educational Needs policy is reviewed in compliance with the Board of management's policy for the cyclical review of all school policies as set out in The School Plan.

13. Reference list

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- Ireson, J., & Hallam, S. (1999). Raising Standards: is ability grouping the answer? *Oxford Review of Education*, 25(3), 344.