An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Indicators of Effective Practice for Post-Primary Schools

Supporting Young People with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Classes

Whole-school reflective practice is a critical process in enhancing educational provision and outcomes for young people with special educational needs. Indicators of effective practice are set out here to support whole-school inclusive practices.

These Indicators may be used for planning as part of the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) process. They are a guide for school leaders, the special education teaching team and other school teams, including the Student Support Team, and all school staff to review and reflect on the school's provision for young people with special educational needs, which may include:

- identifying areas of current effective practice
- building on these effective practices
- prioritising areas for development

Section 1

- provides indicators for review of inclusive practice across each of the eight principles underpinning the Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools - Supporting Young People with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Classes.

Section 2

- provides indicators for schools to reflect upon and review their processes for identification, planning and review of support at each level of the Continuum of Support.

Section 3

- includes three examples, or case studies, illustrating how the problem-solving process informs the provision of support at each level of the Continuum of Support. **Click here.**

Areas identified for development following reflections, may be addressed through the accompanying Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools: Supporting Young People with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Classes and/or through consultation with relevant support services, including the National Council for Special Education [NCSE], the National Educational Psychological Service [NEPS], and/or the Inspectorate. Additionally, this school-led process might highlight areas for development that could be addressed through targeted teacher professional learning (TPL). It is recommended that schools identify a small number of realistic and relevant priority areas for targeted review.

Section 1
Key principles underpinning inclusive education provision

Eight key principles provide the basis for schools to guide the implementation and ongoing development of their systems, structures, practices and policies to support the inclusion of all young people, including those with special educational needs. These principles are illustrated in Figure 1 below. Schools can review, further develop and implement inclusive provision of special education teaching support for young people with special educational needs, by engaging with the eight key principles and associated indicators of effective practice. Young people may have special educational needs across a range of areas, including literacy, numeracy, language and communication, social interaction, emotional development, sensory and physical development.

Figure 1: Key principles to support whole-school inclusive education provision.

Key Principle 1:
Inclusive Education System

An education system which embraces diversity is responsive to, and values difference. It is one that identifies and removes barriers to access, participation and achievement.

Indicator: What this looks like in school practice	Developed	Developing
The board of management is aware of responsibilities to make arrangements for inclusive education provision under the relevant education legislation.[1]		
The board of management makes arrangements for the preparation of a school plan that ensures equity of access to, and participation in all aspects of school life by young people with special educational needs, to the greatest extent practicable.		
The board of management ensures that all young people have access to a high quality education as well as high standards of teaching and learning.		
The principal, and other leaders in the school, lead the development, communication and monitoring of whole-school inclusive policies and evidence-informed practices that are responsive to the needs of young people with special educational needs.		
The board of management, together with the school principal, ensures that school systems and structures are in place which respect and value diversity and respond inclusively to difference.		
All young people have access to a broad, balanced and appropriate curriculum.In post-primary schools, a wide range of subjects and programmes at Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle are offered so that young people with special educational needs have access to a curriculum that is most appropriate to their educational needs.		
Appropriately high expectations are communicated that all young people, including those with special educational needs, achieve their full potential.		
Systems are in place to identify, minimise and remove barriers for young people with special educational needs to participate and achieve success alongside their peers.		
Priority areas for further development		

1 *Circular to the Management Authorities of all Post Primary Schools: Secondary, Community*
1 Education Act, 1998, Section 15 (irishstatutebook.ie)
School Self-Evaluation Guidelines (www.gov.ie)
Looking at our School 2022 (www.gov.ie)

Key Principle 2:
Inclusive School Culture

Inclusion is the responsibility of the whole-school community with a shared understanding of the need for all to experience a sense of belonging, connectedness and of being valued members of that community. A place where all, to the greatest extent possible, can be present, participate, achieve and be supported in mainstream education settings.

Indicator: What this looks like in school practice	Developed	Developing
The whole-school community has a shared understanding of inclusion that commits to respecting diversity and this is evident in all aspects of school life.		
A culture of reflection is promoted that involves an appraisal of inclusive practices in collaboration with parents/guardians and young people with special educational needs.		
An inclusive school culture that fosters whole-school positive attitudes to inclusion, enables all young people with special educational needs to experience a sense of being valued members of the school community.		
School policies and practices are inclusive and ensure that young people with special educational needs experience meaningful engagement, progress and success in their learning.		
The principal, and other school leaders, ensure that to the greatest extent possible, young people with special educational needs receive their education alongside their peers.		
All staff foster positive and responsive relationships, and a safe and welcoming environment is provided where young people experience a sense of belonging and connectedness in the school community.		
The principal, and other school leaders, ensure that there is a shared and collective responsibility, amongst all staff members, in meeting the needs of young people through inclusive, whole-school and classroom practices.		
Priority areas for further development		

Key Principle 3:
Collaboration

A collaborative approach involves the whole-school community, including young people, teachers and parents/guardians working together to proactively support young people with special educational needs.

Indicator: What this looks like in school practice	Developed	Developing
There is a collaborative whole-school community approach involving the young person, teachers, and parents/guardians to effectively and proactively support learning and wellbeing. This approach includes close collaboration between the special education teaching team and the Student Support Team.		
The school principal leads the collaborative process in conjunction with the core special education teaching team.		
The views of the young people with special educational needs are central to decision-making with regard to their education, and in planning to meet their individual needs.		
Subject teachers are responsible for the participation and learning of all young people in their class groups, and collaborate with special education teachers to promote meaningful inclusion.		
The collaborative process involves planning, reflection, and review of existing policies and practices, to support the purposeful participation and inclusion of young people with special educational needs in their learning and in school life.		
Collaboration involves ongoing review of school policies and practices on inclusion and provision for young people with special educational needs, with specific reference to: • identification of strengths, needs and interests • the identification of priority learning needs that form the basis of target-setting in the Student Support Plan • communication of the Student Support Plan to inform subject teachers' preparation and planning, to include all young people		

Indicator: What this looks like in school practice	Developed	Developing
• communication of the Student Support Plan to the Student Support Team as appropriate and necessary • monitoring and review of the type and level of supports provided • identification and monitoring of outcomes and response to targeted interventions		
Collaboration with parents/guardians is a critical factor in enhancing outcomes for young people with special educational needs. Collaboration with parents/guardians occurs in relation to: • their child's strengths, needs and interests • the nature of supports and strategies developed to support their child • regular reviews of progress		
Collaboration with external agencies (including NEPS, HSE, NCSE and Tusla) for those with the greatest level of need takes place, where necessary, to ensure consistency in a shared understanding of the young person's special educational needs.		
Priority areas for further development		

Key Principle 4:
Wellbeing

The wellbeing needs of all young people are central to education provision. Belonging and connectedness to the school community is fostered and reflected in whole-school policy, planning and practice.

Indicator: What this looks like in school practice	Developed	Developing
The wellbeing of all young people, including those with special educational needs, is developed and enhanced through their experience of school, which includes challenges and successes achieved through the provision of well-planned learning activities, and participation in all aspects of school life, as appropriate.		
There is a whole-school commitment to ensuring that the voice and participation of young people with special educational needs are respected and valued.		.
Belonging and connectedness of young people with special educational needs to their school community is fostered and reflected in the four key areas of wellbeing[2], including: • school culture and environment • curriculum (including teaching and learning) • policy and planning • relationships and partnerships		
Wellbeing is promoted through the development of positive relationships between young people and their peers, as well as between young people and adults in the school community.		
The experience of positive and supportive relationships includes at least one key adult in the school context who has knowledge and understanding of the young person's strengths, needs and interests.		
Teachers consider the wellbeing needs of young people with special educational needs to inform educational planning, provision, teaching, learning and assessment approaches.		

[2] gov.ie - Wellbeing in Education (www.gov.ie)

Indicator: What this looks like in school practice	Developed	Developing
Teachers engage with young people with special educational needs and their parents/guardians to identify social, leisure and recreational activities, as well as opportunities for generalisation of skills, based on their individual strengths and interests.		
The school promotes access to extra-curricular activities for young people with special educational needs where their interests are fostered and developed, and which provide opportunities for social contact with the broader community.		
Priority areas for further development		

Key Principle 5:
Engagement and Participation

The views of young people are considered in all matters that affect them. School policies and practices support young people's purposeful participation in their learning and in the life of the school community.

Indicator: What this looks like in school practice	Developed	Developing
Young people with special educational needs experience a sense of belonging, meaningful engagement and active participation in all aspects of school life, including social, leisure and recreational activities, as appropriate.		
All teachers ensure that young people with special educational needs experience success in learning through meaningful participation and purposeful engagement in their education.		
Young people are involved in decision-making about their education, and their views are valued. This process takes account of the individual communication preferences of young people with special educational needs.		
The principal ensures that school policies and practices reflect the views of all young people, including those with special educational needs.		
Young people with special educational needs are involved in identifying their own strengths and needs, in setting learning targets, and in monitoring their progress and response to intervention.		
Young people with special educational needs participate and are represented on various student teams, such as the school's Student Council.		
Priority areas for further development		

Key Principle 6:
Young Person Centred and Needs Based

Schools use the Continuum of Support framework and the Problem-Solving Process to identify and respond to young people's special educational needs, and to monitor their response to intervention. Special educational needs occur along a continuum, ranging from mild to more significant, and from transient to enduring. It is recognised that needs may change over time.

Indicator: What this looks like in school practice	Developed	Developing
The principal ensures that young people with the greatest level of need have access to the greatest level of support.		
Levels of supports provided to young people are aligned to their identified special educational needs. These may include learning, social and emotional needs, as well as physical, sensory, and language and communication needs.		
Teachers use the Continuum of Support and problem-solving process to identify and respond to young people's special educational needs and to monitor their response to intervention.		
The principal ensures that a Student Support File is developed and regularly updated for all young people with special educational needs.		
The principal ensures that young people with special educational needs have a Student Support Plan which is monitored and reviewed regularly by a member/s of the special education teaching team in collaboration with parents/guardians and the young person themselves. This will involve collaboration with the Student Support Team when needed.		
The principal ensures that the number of special education teachers supporting each young person with special educational needs is kept to the minimum necessary to provide continuity of support.		
The principal ensures that a member of the special education teaching team facilitates necessary communication between the young person, school staff, parents/ guardians, and relevant external professionals.		
Young people with special educational needs have access to a broad, relevant, balanced and inclusive curriculum, through the provision of appropriate teaching approaches tailored to individual strengths and needs.		
The holistic development of young people is central to their post-primary education in order for them to develop knowledge and a broad range of skills, competencies and values that enable personal wellbeing, active citizenship and lifelong learning.		
Priority areas for further development		

Key Principle 7:
Evidence-Informed Practice and Outcomes

Interventions and supports provided to young people are evidence-informed and based on identified learning strengths and needs gathered from a range of sources. Outcomes are identified and monitored based on the young person's response to targeted interventions.

Indicator: What this looks like in school practice	Developed	Developing
Following a comprehensive identification of strengths and needs, teachers draw on evidence-informed practices to support the development of learning, social, emotional, communication and life skills.		
Whole-school systems are in place to ensure that young people's response to intervention is used to monitor outcomes over time and to identify emerging needs.		
There is a whole-school focus on the establishment of a positive learning environment for all.		
Teachers ensure that interventions are tailored to the young person's context in the school setting, with opportunities for generalisation of skills in other settings, for example, in the wider school and local communities and at home.		
Systems are in place to gather information from a variety of sources, including formal and informal school-based assessment, in order to: • identify learning strengths and needs • identify priority concerns • inform SMART targets • review response to intervention		
There is a whole-school approach to ensuring that interventions chosen for the development of skills across all areas of development are informed by the young person's strengths, interests, age and stage of development.		
School management facilitate teachers to engage in and share relevant TPL to build capacity and to develop their own competencies in the identification, implementation and monitoring of evidence-informed approaches.		
The Student Support Plan records SMART targets, interventions, and response to interventions. The Student Support Plan is reviewed and updated regularly.		
Priority areas for further development		

Key Principle 8:
Governance and Accountability

The special education teaching allocation is a ring-fenced resource for the sole purpose of providing additional and targeted supports to young people with identified and recorded special educational needs. Schools are accountable in complying with the relevant legislation and departmental circular(s) in the correct deployment of special education teaching resources.

Indicator: What this looks like in school practice	Developed	Developing
The board of management, together with the school principal, ensure that special education teaching resources are deployed for their intended purpose of providing additional support to young people with special educational needs, as recorded in the Schedule of Deployment of Special Education Teachers for Young People with Special Educational Needs (Guidelines, Appendix 2).		
The deployment of special education teaching resources complies with relevant legislation and departmental circular(s).		
A comprehensive school policy on the education of young people with special educational needs is available and communicated to the school community.		
School policies include details of the admission and participation of young people with special educational needs, the arrangements for identifying these young people, and for providing for them in the school.		
The principal oversees the establishment and maintenance of a School Provision Plan (Guidelines, Appendix 1) and ensures that young people identified with special educational needs, who access special education teaching supports, are recorded in the plan.		
All staff are aware of their responsibility for the inclusion of young people with special educational needs in the school community.		
Priority areas for further development		

Section 2:

Indicators of Effective Practice – Implementing the Problem–Solving Process across the Continuum of Support

This section outlines indicators of effective practice for preparation and planning at the levels of **Subject Classroom Support-All, School Support-Some** and **School Support Plus-Few** of the Continuum of Support (Figure 2).

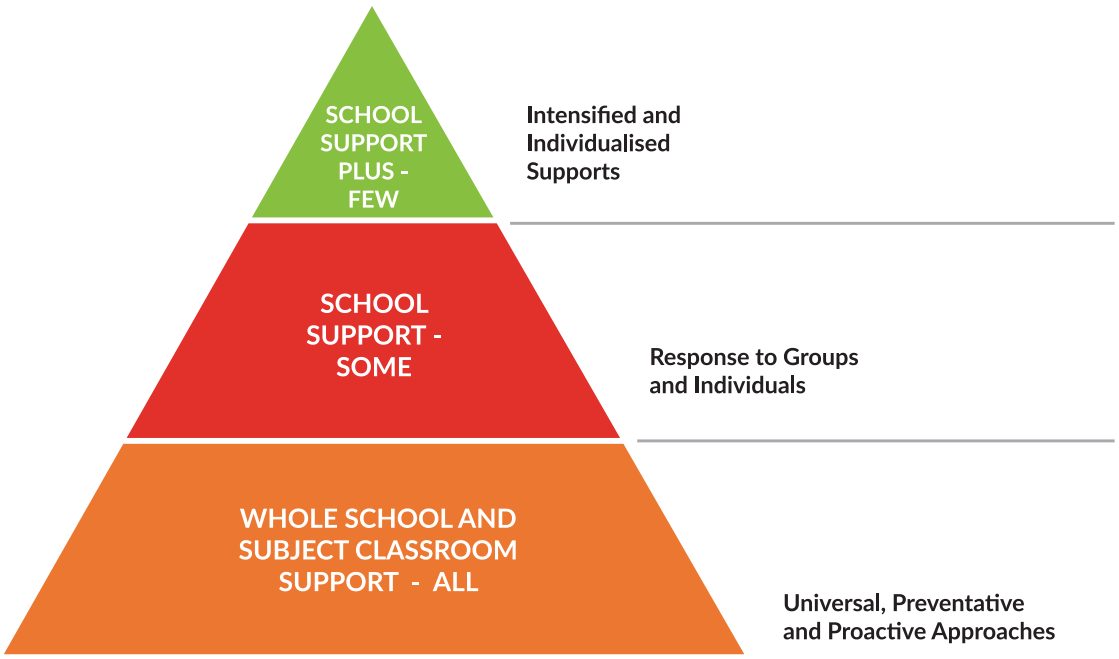

Figure 2 - Continuum of Support

This is intended as a guide to support schools to prepare, plan and reflect on inclusive practices in the implementation of the Problem-Solving Process (Figure 3) at each level of the Continuum of Support. Key steps in this process are outlined at each level.

This section also builds on the process for identifying and responding to needs across the Continuum of Support as outlined in Section 4 of the Guidelines, and should be used in conjunction with the Guidelines in the development of inclusive policies and for the purpose of reflection on inclusive school practices. An emphasis is placed at each level of the Continuum of Support on young-person centred, strengths-based, and needs-led, collaborative practices, which facilitate the inclusion of all young people with special educational needs.

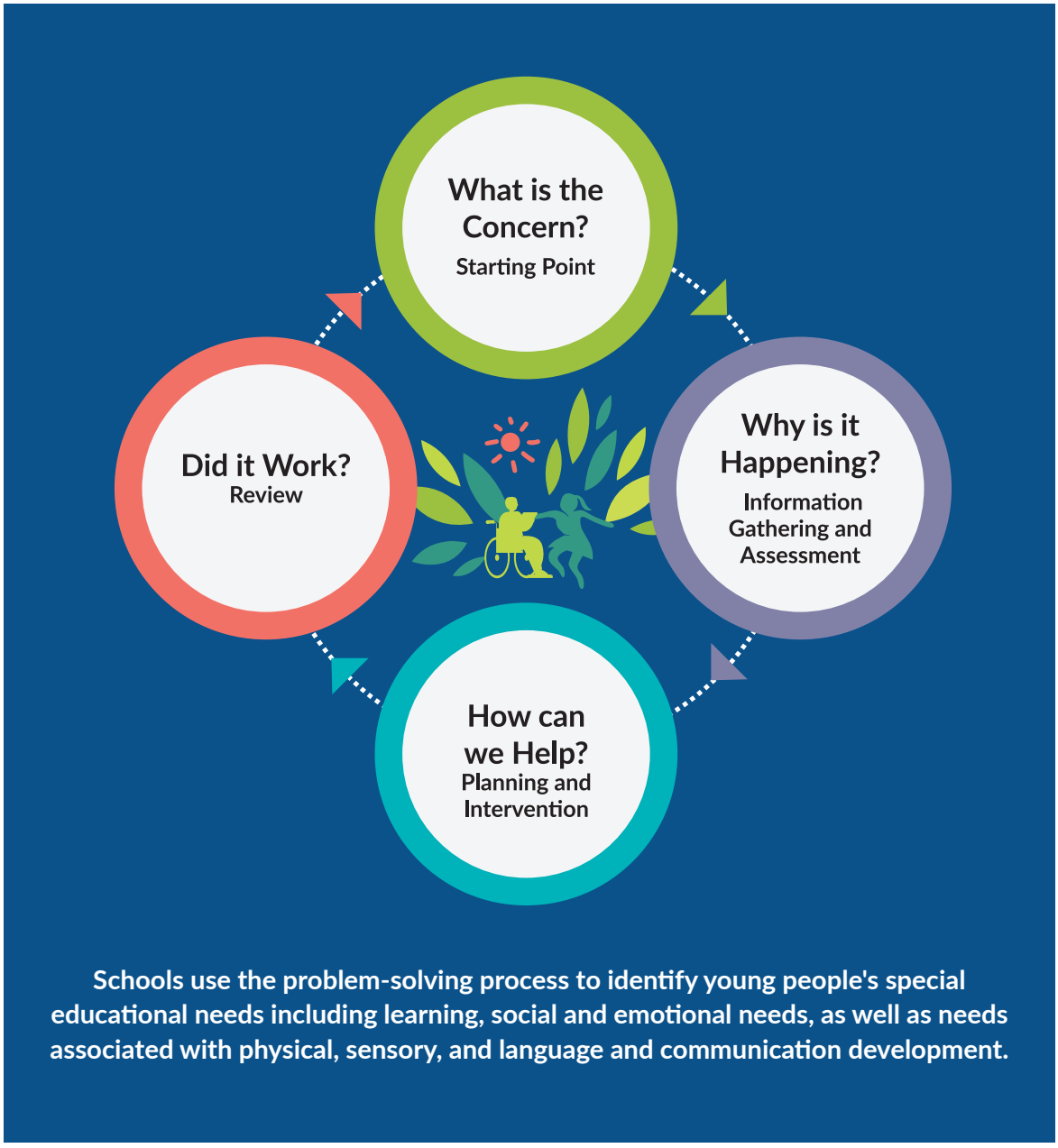

Figure 3 - The Problem-Solving Process

Subject Classroom Support-All: Problem-Solving Process

Subject Classroom Support-All is the first response, led by the subject teacher, when concerns emerge in relation to a young person's learning, wellbeing and/or social-emotional development[3]. This is the point where initial adaptations in pace, delivery and content are made as part of good teaching practice to ensure that all young people can participate in their learning.

Indicator: What this looks like in school practice	Developed	Developing
The subject teacher has primary responsibility for the teaching, learning and assessment of all young people in their classroom.		
Subject teachers monitor and adapt the learning environment to accommodate the diverse strengths and needs of young people in their classrooms, including: • physical factors - layout and organisation of classroom space and school environments • universal approaches to teaching, learning and assessment • communication of expectations and routines • adaptations and accommodations to engage, motivate and sustain the interests of all learners		
Subject teachers record and monitor the participation and learning of all young people in their classes. Concerns in relation to the progress and participation of young people are recorded and monitored as part of their regular subject/lesson planning and review.		
Subject teachers consult with the young person where needs are identified in regard to learning and/or participation, to ascertain their views on: • preferred ways of learning and motivators • potential reasons for difficulties observed e.g. language or social factors • any adaptations or accommodations to the teaching and learning environment they consider may be beneficial in the subject classroom context.		

[3] This should be read in conjunction with the *Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools - Supporting Young People with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Classes*, including the Role of the Subject Teacher.

Indicator: What this looks like in school practice	Developed	Developing
Subject teachers consult with the year head, special education teaching team and/or Student Support Team where concerns persist following consultation with the young person as well as adaptations to teaching and learning approaches and/or the learning environment.		
Subjects teachers consult with parents/guardians where difficulties persist in a specific subject area and/or the year head consults with parents/guardians where difficulties persist across curricular areas.		
The year head, Student Support Team, or designated teacher confirms whether there is information from the primary school, parents, or from other sources such as intake screening tests, which indicate previously recorded needs in areas of learning, language, social, emotional, sensory and/or physical development.		
Accommodations, supports and adaptations in the classroom environment are agreed with the young person, teachers, and parents/guardians.		
The subject teacher, with primary responsibility for teaching, learning and assessment in their class, ensures that lesson planning facilitates meaningful participation and engagement of the young person in their learning.		
The subject teacher monitors, reviews and records progress, and in collaboration with the young person, parents/guardians and relevant teachers, agrees to continue teaching support at the level of Subject Classroom Support-All.		
Where there is agreement, following the review process, that the young person continues to experience difficulties that impact on participation and engagement in their learning, support may be provided at the level of School Support-Some. **This is recorded in a Student Support File, led by a member of the special education teaching team.**		
Priority areas for further development		

School Support-Some: Problem-Solving Process

School Support-Some involves a more targeted problem-solving process, building on information gathered and interventions carried out under Subject Classroom Support-All. This is necessary where the young person's needs are more persistent and enduring and where they have not made sufficient progress in response to intervention at the Subject Classroom Support-All level. Other young people whose needs are supported at this level have known and documented needs identified prior to the transfer to post-primary school.

Indicator: What this looks like in school practice	Developed	Developing
The special education teacher/s, in collaboration with the subject teacher/s, provides additional teaching support to young people with special educational needs.		
Members of the core special education team engage in TPL to upskill and develop the requisite knowledge, competencies and skills required for the provision of high quality support for young people with special educational needs.		
Members of the core special education teaching team ensure that all information relevant to the special educational needs of young people is recorded in a **Student Support File.** The Student Support Team may also have relevant information to inform this process.		
The core special education teaching team records the names, or identifiers, of all young people with special educational needs receiving special education teaching support at the level of School Support-Some in the **School Provision Plan for Young People with Special Educational Needs** (Appendix 1, Guidelines).		
The core special education teaching team, in collaboration with the principal, leads on the identification, preparation, planning, provision and timetabling of additional teaching support for young people with special educational needs in the school context, using the Continuum of Support problem-solving process.		
A flexible and student-centred approach to intervention is demonstrated through the provision of a combination of in-class support, small group, and/or individual support.		
The number of special education teachers providing additional teaching support to a young person is kept to a minimum, to ensure a consistent and coordinated approach to the type and level of targeted intervention provided.		

Indicator: What this looks like in school practice	Developed	Developing
Members of the core special education teaching team ensure that a **Student Support Plan** is developed, implemented and reviewed for all young people with special educational needs to whom they are directly providing additional teaching support.		
Where more than one teacher is involved in providing the additional teaching support, one special education teacher takes the lead in the planning process, the coordination of supports for that young person, and communication with relevant subject and/or special education teachers, parents/guardians and external agencies, where appropriate.		
As part of the problem-solving process, the lead special education teacher clarifies concerns through collaboration with the young person, their parents/guardians, and relevant teachers, to reach a shared understanding of the young person's strengths, interests and needs, and to ensure consistency in approaches to the provision of support.		
The lead special education teacher collaboratively develops a **Student Support Plan** which includes: • priority areas for targeted intervention • SMART targets • level and type of intervention provided • details of personnel involved in implementation of interventions • review of response to intervention		
Special education teachers plan lessons, aligned to the prioritised needs and SMART targets set out in Student Support Plans, for the effective implementation of evidence-informed interventions, to meet the needs of individuals and/or small groups of young people to whom they provide support.		
Student Support Plans demonstrate a clear progression in targets over time, and include modifications to teaching approaches.		
Where targets are not met, the special education teacher takes the lead in ensuring that they are broken down into smaller incremental steps, teaching and learning approaches are adapted, and/or the targets are changed, as necessary.		

Indicator: What this looks like in school practice	Developed	Developing
Where it is agreed, following review of progress that a young person continues to require support at the level of **School Support-Some**, the problem-solving cycle and targeted intervention continues based on the young person's progress and response to intervention.		
Where it is agreed, following review of progress that a young person has made significant progress and responded well to intervention, consideration is given to support at the level of **Subject Classroom Support-All.**		
Where it is agreed, following review of progress, that a young person has not made progress or responded to intervention as expected, or requires a higher level of support due to changing demands in the environment and/or the curriculum, consideration is given to support at the level of **School Support Plus-Few**.		
Priority areas for further development		

School Support Plus-Few: Problem-Solving Process

Young people whose special educational needs are supported at the level of School Support Plus-Few **are those with the greatest level of need**. This may include young people whose needs have been identified as significant and enduring, and those who have not responded to intervention as expected at the level of School Support-Some.

Indicator: What this looks like in school practice	Developed	Developing
Members of the core special education team who are providing support at this level of the Continuum of Support, are those that have the highest level of expertise, experience and professional development in supporting young people with special educational needs.		
Members of the core special education teaching team ensure that all information relevant to the special educational needs of young people is recorded in a **Student Support File.** The Student Support Team may also have relevant information to inform this process and are consulted.		
The core special education teaching team records the names, or identifiers, of all young people with special educational needs receiving special education teaching support at the level of School Support Plus-Few in the **School Provision Plan for Young People with Special Educational Needs** (Appendix 1, Guidelines).		
The core special education team, in collaboration with the principal, leads on the identification, preparation, planning, provision and timetabling of additional supports for young people with special educational needs using the Continuum of Support problem-solving process.		
A flexible and student-centred approach to intervention is demonstrated through the provision of a combination of in-class support, small group and/or individual support, in a variety of settings, including mainstream subject classrooms.		
The number of special education teachers providing additional teaching support to a young person is kept to a minimum, to ensure a consistent and coordinated approach to the type and level of targeted intervention provided.		

Indicator: What this looks like in school practice	Developed	Developing
One special education teacher, who has knowledge of the strengths, needs and interests of the young person, and who provides regular direct teaching support to the young person, takes the lead in the: • development, implementation and review of the Student Support Plan • coordination of provision • communication with relevant subject and/or special education teachers, special needs assistants (SNAs), parents/guardians and external agencies, where appropriate.		
The lead special education teacher gathers information, through a comprehensive, collaborative and holistic process, including formal and informal assessment, to reach a shared understanding of the young person's strengths, interests and needs, and ensures consistency in approaches to the provision of support.		
The problem-solving process at the level of School Support Plus-Few involves the identification of strengths, needs and interests across all areas of development, as part of a holistic and collaborative approach.		
The lead special education teacher collaboratively develops a highly individualised **Student Support Plan** which reflects the needs of the young person across key areas of support. This includes: • priority areas for targeted evidence-informed intervention • SMART targets • level and type of intervention provided • roles and responsibilities of personnel involved in implementation of interventions • a record of response to intervention, which is closely monitored and reviewed regularly		
Collaboration and communication between subject teachers, the special education teaching team, parents/guardians and the young person, takes place to identify and plan for the most appropriate teaching strategies, evidence-informed approaches, interventions, curricular programmes and/or adaptations to best meet the needs of young person. The Student Support Team may also be involved in this process.		

Indicator: What this looks like in school practice	Developed	Developing
The role of the SNA in supporting the implementation of targets relating to primary and secondary care needs of the young person is documented in the Student Support Plan/File.		
Student Support Plans demonstrate a clear progression over time, and include modifications to teaching approaches, as appropriate, to achieve targets.		
Where it is agreed, based on review of progress targets are not met, they are broken down into smaller incremental steps, teaching and learning approaches are adapted, and/or the targets are changed, as necessary.		
Where it is agreed, following review of progress that a young person continues to require support at the level of **School Support Plus-Few**, the problem-solving cycle and targeted intervention continues based on the young person's progress and response to intervention.		
Where it is agreed, following review of progress that a young person has made significant progress and has responded well to intervention, consideration is given to support at the level of **School Support-Some** or **Subject Classroom Support - All.**		
Where it is agreed, following review of progress, that a young person has not made progress or responded to intervention as expected, the core special education teaching team considers consultation with external agencies e.g. NCSE, NEPS, HSE, TUSLA.		
Priority areas for further development		

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