

# **Policy on Equality of Access and Participation** **(Equal Opportunities)**

## **Introductory Statement:**

This policy was formulated by a sub - committee consisting of Geraldine Mongey and Sarah Reevell (Resource Teachers) on 16th June 2004 in consultation with the other teaching staff members of the school who included Éilis Dillon (Principal), Niamh Murtagh (Deputy Principal) and Anne Mc Intyre (Special Duties Teacher).

## **Rationale:**

It is necessary to have a policy on equality of access and participation due to the following factors:

- Equal Status Act 2000
- Employment Equality Act 1998
- Education Act 1998
- To enable all our pupils to access and participate in education
- To promote the principles of justice and equality for all

## **Relationship to characteristic spirit of the school:**

Our school is a primary school of Roman Catholic denomination. Our Roman Catholic ethos is wholly concerned with fostering the development of relationships - the love of God and the love of every human being. The school recognises that, in the area of relationships, its role is subsidiary to that of the parents. This primary role, which recognises the parent as the primary teacher of the child, is enshrined in the Irish Constitution.

## **Aims**

- *To ensure that each person in our school feels valued and respected and is treated equally*
- *The preparation of pupils for life in a multicultural society and with an understanding of the value of cultural diversity and a sense of pride in their own culture.*

## **Guidelines (content of policy)**

### *Vision*

**St. Michael's National School aspires to provide a safe, caring, environment, which enables and encourages children to develop educationally and grow emotionally. As individuals, they should experience and learn tolerance, respect, appreciation and awareness of other human beings and the world around them.**

Our school vision supports and promote the principles of equality. Our Roman Catholic ethos promotes the love of every human being. Our school environment (including classrooms) is beginning to reflect diversity in a positive manner through use of, images of and with reference to people of different race, culture and language. This will be further developed and encouraged.

## **Organisational Areas**

- All pupils are welcome to enrol in our school irrespective of race, religion, membership of traveler community, family status, gender, sexual orientation or disability. The ethos of the school is Roman Catholic.
- Pupils are placed in age appropriate classes.
- Arrangements can be made for pupils who do not wish to participate in religion classes.
  
- The characteristic ethos of the school is explained to parents so that they are aware of the religious denomination of the school and how it is reflected in the curriculum and in the organisation of the school.
  
- On the enrolment form parents are asked to inform the school of any legal issues which may pertain to the school. The school recognises that parents/guardians may be separated, divorced, same sex or single parent families.

*The Equal Status Act provides for discrimination in relation to employment where the applicant is over 65 years of age. Employers may*

*set a maximum age of recruitment which take account of (a) cost or time involved in training, (b) need for a reasonable period of time in position pre-retirement.*

*Exemptions which may be relevant to race: Irish language proficiency for teachers in primary schools is set down by the Department of Education and Science.*

*A religious, educational or medical institution under the direction or control of a body established for religious purposes whose objectives include provision of services in an environment which promotes certain religious values, does not discriminate if (a) it gives more favourable treatment on the religion ground to an employee where it is reasonable to do so in order to maintain the religious ethos or (b) it takes action which is reasonably necessary to prevent an employee from undermining the religious ethos of the institution.*

*An employer must do all that is reasonable to accommodate the needs of an employee with a disability by providing special facilities or treatment. This obligation is limited when it costs more than what is referred to as “nominal costs”, the same applies to enrolment of pupils with special needs, the onus for the provision of reasonable accommodation lies with the Department of Education and Science and with the Board of Management.*

## **Staff**

- The Board of Management is an equal opportunities employer. It does not discriminate against any application for a position (or continuation in employment, training opportunities, promotion etc.) in the school based on the nine grounds as set out in the Equal Status Act\*
- All procedures for appointment of promotional posts within the school are carried out in accordance with CPSMA Regulations and within the guidance of the INTO. (INTO Handbook/CD).
- The format outlined in the CPSMA Board of Management handbook for the advertisement and selection of staff is known and followed.
- The school has a policy in relation to bullying.
- Classes are assigned to teachers based on numbers and collaboration between teaching staff. The principal has the final say in allocation of classes.
- The school’s fair and equitable procedure in relation to job sharing, secondment, staff development, career breaks, study leave, carer’s leave, maternity and paternity leave applications, are based on the guidelines issued by the Department of Education and Science.

### **Grounds:**

Age, Member of Traveller Community, Sexual Orientation, Family Status, Marital Status, Disability, Gender, Religion, Race

### **Home School Communication**

- In the event that parents are separated and legal custody has been granted to one/both and evidence of it furnished to the school, the school will arrange to have separate meetings for both parents if necessary.
- The school will work with parents whose first language is not English to establish communication needs. The support of available agencies will be called upon.

### **Parental Involvement**

- The Parents' Association's broad balance reflects the present make up of local community.
- The Parents' Association's gender balance means that meetings are open to all parents.
- The Parents' Association could, in consultation with the Board of Management, organise intercultural events/language classes.
- The school encourages parents to come into the classroom to share experiences by issuing invitations at parent/teacher meetings and at Introductory Meetings. The teacher would always be present in the event that a parent chooses to come into the school. The subject matter would be discussed prior to the event.

### **Uniform**

The choosing of uniform is carried out democratically and is at the instigation of the Parents' Association. The uniform, at present, allows a parent to choose between a skirt and trousers for girls. In the event that a parent cannot purchase a uniform the school will, if possible, provide the sweatshirts.

### **Attendance**

- All parents are made aware of the Education Welfare Act (2000) and issues relating to attendance, as mentioned in the Act, are explained in writing annually to the parents.
- Non-English speaking parents are made aware of it's implications in writing.
- Parents must send notes for all absenteeism – this is put in writing annually.

If pupils absent themselves to participate in religious/cultural ceremonies that do not coincide with those of the school, then the parents must inform the school of the reasons for absenteeism in writing.

### **Lunch**

At present we are not aware that the School's healthy lunch policy poses any problems for any pupil with special dietary requirements. The school would treat any such request seriously and consult with the Board of Management.

### **Code of Behaviour and Anti Bullying Policy**

The Code of Behaviour and Anti-Bullying Policy of our school encourages and promotes respect for all.

### **Induction of New Pupils/Staff**

- The child is assisted to settle into the new class/school by; being made welcome, being encouraged to speak in his/her own language where possible if the child chooses, through sharing of cultures within the school, being listened to, being provided with opportunities for collaborative work, partnership work and being made to feel safe.
- If possible there will be communication between the class teacher and the parents/child prior to the child starting.
- New staff members are inducted gradually into the school. When possible, the principal will meet with new staff members prior to beginning. The staff member will be taken on a tour of the school and the daily routines pointed out. Copies of all relevant plans and policies will be made available. The new staff member will be introduced to all of the staff members and support will be offered as and when the need arises.

### **Homework**

- All pupils are not necessarily given the same homework. The teacher differentiates according to his/her professional judgment
- The school caters for children who are learning English for the first time by differentiating materials and language, by allowing the child time to hear, absorb and gain an understanding of English before they are obliged to speak, and generally enabling the child

to acquire the skills and vocabulary to learn in this new environment. The child will be given the opportunity to demonstrate understanding before they are able to speak for example, by painting, drawing etc.,

- Visual supports for learning such as pictures, photos, charts and maps are used in the classroom.
- Such children will do the prescribed homework, as given to the general class, when deemed capable by class teacher.
- Parents can be involved in homework by supervising and supporting the child, by adhering to the school's homework policy and by contacting the class teacher when there is a problem.
- In assigning homework the school considers the access the child has to the materials required and tasks set. Children are allowed to bring home reference books. (*Surfing the net is not realistic if the child has no access to I.T.*)

### **Resources**

- Diversity is reflected in the textbooks used in the school.
- Images of other cultures are visible in the school environment / classroom.
- The school library has to be further build up to reflect diversity.
- The school uses the Internet as an intercultural resource in the Senior Room.
- The school has identified the resources required to support the child with a learning disability.

### **Tours and school organised events**

- All pupils have equal opportunity to participate in school tours and school organised outings (Wheelchair transport will be provided when necessary and access/cost is kept to the minimum). The Parents' Association has kindly paid for transport to specific sporting activities (Cumann na mBunscoil)
- Persons conducting extra curricular activities e.g. Irish dancing teachers, music teachers, etc. – are aware of the obligation on schools to provide an education to the pupils which is appropriate to their abilities and needs. The educational needs of all pupils including those with a disability or other special educational needs are identified and provided for. (Section 9 (a) Education Act).

## **Staff Development**

- All teachers are aware of what equality involves, the principles of equality education and the methodologies advocated for its success.
- Teachers are encouraged to engage in staff development in this area by availing of courses.
- Teachers can support one another in this area by sharing information informally and at staff meetings.
- Staff members are aware of organisations which have information/can offer support.
- The school ensures that subject areas of the curriculum reflect the diversity of other cultures and the principles of equality by reviewing these areas with a view towards diversity.
- Classroom activities and school procedures affirm diversity.

## **Extra- Curricular Activities**

- The school considers whether these activities address equality of access and participation before promoting them and in general all activities are held during school time.

## **Transition to Post Primary**

- All pupils are encouraged to continue their education to post primary level.
- The school supports and encourages “at risk pupils” to continue their education by discussing post primary level with them, by talking to their parents and by meeting the principal and resource teachers at the post-primary school.
- To assist successful transition to post primary school, the principal of the local post primary school visits our school to discuss various items. Transition year students discuss post primary school when they visit. Past pupils are welcomed back.

## **Curriculum**

### **General**

- All children access all areas of the curriculum.

- The school enables all children (regardless of background) to achieve in academic, sporting and extra-curricular activities by providing such experiences during school hours and by encouraging and praising the children for taking part.
- Each child is engaged in intellectually stimulating work appropriate to his/her intellectual ability
- The school encourage non-English speaking children to speak English by introducing a language experience approach combined with suitable teaching methods.
- Children are given opportunities to explore the other language/s of the classroom and to learn a little of that language.
- Communication is emphasised when the child starts to speak English.
- The teaching methodologies employed in the classroom are to support integration and promote equality of participation include circle time, co-operative learning, projects, varied groupings and methodologies.
- ICT is utilised as a resource to meet the needs of pupils in curricular areas as a means of collaboration. ICT employs a multi media approach, the use of specific software programmes and the use of assistive technology etc.,
- Specific lessons in each curricular area, which support and promote respect for diversity include SPHE – Myself and Others, oral language work, and Religion.

### **Gaeilge**

- Some children are exempt from Irish in accordance with Circular 14/87.
- The psychologist is aware of circular 14/87 when assessing a child.



- We support teachers studying for the Scrúdú Cáilíocht sa Ghaeilge by encouraging their efforts and speaking Irish to them when appropriate.
- We assist parents to support their child to learn Irish by positively emphasising the use of Irish as a means of communication, by encouragement, by updating them in newsletters etc.,

### **English**

- The principles of equality & respect for diversity are reflected in the textbooks used by the pupils.
- There is support for pupils and parents whose mother tongue is not English.
- Oral language- All our pupils get an opportunity to partake, debate, justify, etc.
- Use of the novel - in selecting novels we consider the portrayal of all peoples etc.
- Children have a say in which books we select for the library. We also consider curricular themes or projects.
- Phonics – The challenges faced by non- English speaking pupils are always taken into consideration.
- Print rich environment –we are working towards reflecting and promoting diversity, reflecting the mother tongue of pupils in the classroom, library, newsletter etc.,
- The school aims to build knowledge of the vocabulary of rights through education in the curricular areas of SPHE and through our Code of Behaviour.
- Creative writing – opportunities are provided for pupils to use their imagination, to write about their opinions, etc.
- Language - a springboard for other pupils to share their language with English speaking pupils through collaborative work.

## **Maths**

- Currencies – the challenges include that children may have come from countries where measures may not be metric, commonality of numeration and number operations, Arabic/Chinese contribution to maths, famous mathematicians, counting in different languages, etc., are all taken into consideration.
- Using statistics, proportional representation in elections, graphs etc.
- Use of ICT

Teaching of specific vocabulary, which may be required by pupils whose first language is not English.

## **SESE History**

- There is a balance of hero/heroine, international history, portrayal of perpetrators, gender ratio, principal characters in history - Gandhi, Mandela, Luther King, Nobel, Eleanor Roosevelt, Emily Pankhurst, Queen Maeve, Cleopatra, Marie Curée, etc. Histories are affirmed. Pupils /parents are encouraged to prepare a brief history of their country of origin.
- Topics such as slavery, war, child labour, emigration, Universal Declaration of Human Rights etc. are dealt with sensitively and in an educational context.

## **SESE Geography**

- People from other countries, food produced in other countries, cultures, national flags, national dress, terrain and physical geography, climates, etc are dealt with in this class.
- Pupils from other countries are encouraged to share their knowledge of that country.

## **Science**

- Flora and Fauna of other countries, food of other countries, role of environmental protection agencies

## **SPHE**

- Many opportunities present themselves under the strands Myself and others, Myself and the wider world and the strand unit Media education.

## **Religion**

Understanding other religions, commonalty of other religions, struggle for the freedom of belief, etc.

## **Arts Education**

- Music and songs from other countries, pop stars, instruments, folk music, reggae, international aspect of music, freedom songs, labour songs, etc.

## **Drama**

- International, cultural, short stories, enacting, role-play, etc.

## **Visual Arts**

- Famous artists, examples of ethnic art, international aspect of art, parents to demonstrate traditional crafts, dress and patterns, pottery, etc.
- Parents from other countries have been involved in sharing some of the customs/crafts of that country.

## **PE**

- Famous sports persons e.g. Jessie Owens, Sonia O Sullivan, traditional games and their country of origin.
- Dance
- Separate changing facilities are provided for both boys and girls.

## **Success Criteria**

- *Awareness of language of rights, of concept of equality and justice*
- *Reduction in incidents of bullying/racist incidents*
- *Pupils having and using appropriate language*
- *All pupils accessing and participating in all areas of the curriculum and school life at a level appropriate to their needs*
- *Improvement in pupil attainment levels in curricular areas (especially literacy)*
- *Parental satisfaction with the values being promoted in the school*
- *Staff and pupils feel they are valued*

### **Roles and Responsibility**

- *Teaching staff in differentiating the curriculum to reflect the principles of this policy*
- *All staff in supporting the policy*
- *Parents and community in supporting the policy*
- *Board of Management in supporting the policy and in providing the identified resources*

### **Implementation Date**

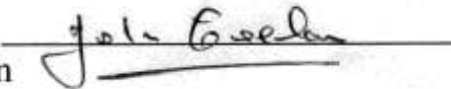
September 2004. The staff will monitor the implementation of this policy during the school year 2004-2005.

### **Timetable for Review**

This policy was reviewed during 2007&2009 and changes/amendments are included.

### **Ratification & Communication**

This policy was ratified by the BOM on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2004.

Signed :   
Fr Geelan