

Our approach to SEN

Our Gospel values lead all aspects of our SEND support. Given the divine origin and eternal destiny of each person, we strive for the very best outcomes for all our students and aspire for them to become everything God intended them to be.

This has several practical implications:

Notre Dame is an inclusive school. Our default provision is that ‘everybody does everything’. This means that we may have to make significant provision to support our children in mainstream classes and be creative and daring in our responses to individual needs. Perhaps this is best illustrated by a personal anecdote:

Notre Dame’s sports day used to take place at Don Valley stadium and, as the newest member of staff, I found myself banished to the far reaches of the discus circle. I watched children come and go all day, throw their discus and move on but towards the end of the day I noticed two learning support assistants accompanying two wheelchair-bound students, heading towards the discus circle with great intent. At first, I presumed that they were coming to watch; I knew both the boys and the seriousness of their condition and there was no doubt in my mind that throwing a discus was quite beyond them. However, the purposeful nature of their approach suggested that they weren’t coming over to spectate. Beginning to panic, I looked round for an alternative to the discus the other children had used but of course there was none. ‘We’ve come to do the discus,’ declared one of the LSAs. I had no response. But at that moment, she produced a Frisbee from behind her back, helped one of the boys into the circle and we watched together as he and his friend competed with the other children.

In that moment, I felt that I finally understood what made Notre Dame so special. In a nutshell our job each day is to ‘find the Frisbee’ that allows each child to grow and thrive alongside their friends, whatever they’re doing.

However, inclusion involves considerably more than just providing personalised support for children. It is our absolute determination that parents/carers and, most importantly, the students themselves are involved in the identification and categorisation of children’s needs and in planning the most appropriate support. It is commonplace for children and their parents/carers to be involved in both the writing of support plans and the evaluation of their effectiveness.

As a mainstream school, we cater for children in all four categories of need identified in the SEND Code of Practice, namely cognition and learning, communication and inter-action, social, emotional and health difficulties and sensory and/or physical needs. We do not have a specific focus on any one of these categories and whilst we have training and experience in delivering a range of general SEN support methods, we would not claim to be experts in any one area. Where there are needs that we feel cannot be met from our existing resources, we draw on our colleagues from within Sheffield’s Local Offer. Within our department we do have the qualifications to assess children’s cognitive functioning in terms of applying for access arrangements. These same assessments allow us to identify very specific learning needs that students may have, such as slow processing or poor short-term memory. This information is shared with parents and, as and where appropriate, the student him/herself. We can then collaborate in producing a plan which addresses effectively those needs. **However, although conversant with many of the analytical assessments used in this area, we do not have the jurisdiction to diagnose ‘dyslexia’ *per se*.**

Some of our children with SEND face the additional challenge of growing up away from their natural family home. In many ways, our care for these children is no different to that given to all our students; personalised plans centred on Quality First Teaching are put in place and carefully monitored, reviewed and updated. However, these plans may include extra provision for children in care, which involves the School's pastoral team and, where appropriate, support and guidance from outside agencies.

Notre Dame's support for children with SEN is highly personalised. Each child has a unique set of qualities and needs; in order for them to participate fully in School life, support needs to be appropriate for those particular needs. Hence, each child with SEN has an individual SEND support plan, which is shared with all his/her teachers, in order to ensure that the in-class Quality First Teaching that provides the main source of provision is relevant and effective for each child. **It is important to note that there is almost no withdrawal from lessons at Notre Dame. Our team of eight LSAs work alongside children in the classroom, supporting the subject teacher as he/she delivers the curriculum.**

However, it is only the commitment of significant resources that allow our children to succeed in this environment. Providing additional teachers in maths and English allows for our most needy children to be taught in very small (usually less than ten) classes and our whole school accelerated reading programme is of particular value to some of our children with SEN. Our adoption of the 'Units of Sound' literacy programme offers further support and, at our discretion, we also operate an additional literacy programme in place of modern foreign languages.

Further provision comes in a variety of formats; our paired literacy and numeracy programmes, in which Year Seven and Year Eight children are supported by sixth formers is one of which we are particularly proud. We also provide handwriting programmes and individual speech and language courses and at lunchtimes, the LSAs are available in room 208 to support children with their homework or any other academic issues they may have.

As children progress to their GCSE courses, it may be appropriate for them to pursue a more personalised curriculum that includes our General Support programme, which gives students access to additional study skills, literacy and numeracy support, life skills and support with GCSE courses. At A level, support becomes even more personalised, with students themselves central to the planning of academic support and out of lesson mentoring.

Our aspirations for each child are extremely high

St Julie encourages us to 'equip the children for life'. This will mean something unique for each child but for every child it means that we aspire for them to achieve everything they are capable of. Clearly, this would include academic success, where our students consistently perform significantly above the national average. Given this success, it is not surprising that increasing numbers of children with SEND are entering our sixth form, from where there is a steady stream of children going on to higher education.

Whatever a child's potential, it is always our intention to equip them for the next stage of life and beyond, which again involves a highly personalised approach to support, training and transition. From the moment children arrive at Notre Dame, we begin the process of helping them towards Independence, which means aspiring for the best in every area of a child's life.

Children with SEND are expected to contribute to the life of our school.

Our school community can only thrive and fulfil its potential and each member makes his or her own unique contribution to it. Children with SEND play a key role in this. They would be expected to play a full role in the liturgical life of the school, to support other children, particularly those with needs similar to their own, and to advise the school on how it can improve its provision. Over the years, our students with SEND have made a huge contribution to our life together and our successes. Our school would be a much poorer place without them.