

## Holy Family Secondary School



### HFSS Policy

## Accelerated Learners' Programme for Exceptionally Able Students

### As at October 2023

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**Ratified by Board of Management on: 17<sup>th</sup> October 2023**

**Proposed Next Policy Review date: As required**

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Chairperson, Board of Management  
Mrs Teresa Brophy

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Secretary, Board of Management  
Mrs Sarah Allen

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Representative of the Trustee  
Fr. Joe McDermott

## 1. Link to Mission Statement

This Policy has been developed in line with our Mission Statement which states;

*'We promote the Christian virtues of faith, hope, love, gentleness, respect and tolerance, and we emphasise togetherness and family. Guided by these Christian virtues, and dedicated to the pursuit of excellence, it is our mission to provide a safe, caring, inclusive learning environment in which to foster the spiritual, intellectual, academic, aesthetic, physical, emotional and social development of each pupil so that she may fulfil her own unique potential and may leave our school with the capacity and the willingness to contribute to the building of a society characterised by these Christian virtues'*

## 2. Rationale

According to the NCSE (National Council for Special Education) "The Education Act, 1998, makes provision for the education of all students, including those with a disability or other special educational need. 'Special educational needs' are defined in the Act as referring to the needs of students who have a disability and the educational needs of exceptionally able students.

The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, 2004, does not explicitly refer to such needs. **No single agreed international definition of 'exceptionally able' exists.** A range of terms is used interchangeably in the literature and includes 'exceptionally able' and 'exceptional'.

Exceptionally able students are likely to show some of the following characteristics: have acute powers of observation; learn to read early (often prior to attending school); read rapidly and widely; have a well-developed vocabulary; possess intellectual curiosity; absorb information rapidly (often described as sponge-like); have a very good memory; display an ability to concentrate deeply for long periods; have very good powers of reasoning and problem solving; have intense interests; and possess exceptional imaginative powers. Students may have a great interest in 'big questions', such as the nature of the universe and environmental issues. Students may be very sensitive, easily upset and demonstrate a strong sense of fairness".

## 3. Scope of this policy

The policy also operates within a legislative framework and takes account of the following;

- The Education Act, 1998
- The Education Welfare Act, 2000
- Equal Status Act, 2000
- The Equality Act, 2004
- Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, 2004
- Children First Act, 2015
- Looking At Our School, 2016 and 2022 versions

## 4. Important Terms

The term 'exceptionally able' is used in "Exceptionally Able Students – (NCCA, 2007) to describe students who require opportunities for enrichment and extension that go beyond those provided for the general cohort of students. The term tends to be reserved for those students who score above the 98<sup>th</sup> percentile in

a standardised test, i.e., in the top 2% of the population. Standardised tests at HFSS include the CAT 4 Stanine score of 9; Micra and Sigma T tests sten score of 10 and PPDAE sten score of 10.

## 5. Aims

A small minority, up to 5% of our school population may be considered as “exceptionally able”. These students need specific plans to enable their needs to be met. Effective provision may involve writing an Individual Education Plan to clearly identify the areas where the pupils need specific teaching, high expectations, increased differentiation and support.

**It should be noted that good practice for exceptionally able students is also good practice for all students at HFSS.**

The school’s definition of exceptional ability recognises academic and practical performance as well as those who show outstanding artistic, musical and creative talent, physical skills, leadership qualities and the ability to process ideas and information. Students will be supported in this regard.

## 6. Responsibilities and Standard Operating Procedures

### **Role of the Senior Leadership Team**

- To action and to support the procedures of the policy and ensure its effective implementation.
- Prepare data for DES in support of requests for additional resource and personnel to meet the additional educational needs of students.

### **Role of the Additional Needs Co-ordinator**

- To action the procedures of the policy and ensure its effective implementation.
- To lead the AEN team members tasked successful implementation of the policy.
- Liaise with Year Heads, subject departments, class teachers.
- Collate the assessment materials and results.
- Work with the teacher to support the student and plan provision.
- Contact parents and keep them informed.
- Work with all parties to decide on strategies to be used to maximise learning and development.
- Review provision on a regular basis.

### **Role of School Guidance Counsellors:**

- Screen all first year students.
- Organise CATS for First Years, DATS testing for Transition year students.
- Cognitive Ability testing and work closely with the AEN team for successful implementation of the programme.

### **Role of the NCCA**

The NCCA is responsible for leading developments in curriculum and assessment and supporting the implementation of changes resulting from this work. It advises the Minister for Education on the curriculum and syllabus requirements of students with a disability or other special educational needs.

## **Identification of Exceptionally Able Students**

Students will be identified in the following ways

### **New Students**

- By parents/guardians who contact the school directly
- Information gleaned from enrolment forms and documents of new students.

- Information from a written reports/data/school visits sent from the student's Primary school
- Results of HFSS assessments administered by the Guidance Counselling Team/AEN team

### **Existing students**

- Nominations from school staff (Teachers, Year Head, Tutor, AEN team)
- Test results/teacher assessments.
- Student's work.
- By parents in consultation with school (please reference the school's working definition of 'exceptionally able')
- Present and previous professional assessments.

### **Assessment methods:**

- Teacher observation.
- Benchmarking tests and assessment – end of key stage assessments.
- Cognitive Ability Tests.
- In house subject tests and assessments.
- Response to increased challenge.
- Provision of opportunity.
- Response of external agency.

### **Modes of working:**

- Take steps to identify very able/gifted students within their class as soon as possible.
- Assess/gather data to support the nomination.
- Liaise with staff member working as Exceptionally Able Co-ordinator and parents/guardians.
- Agree, plan and implement appropriate provision. Record strategies to be used.
- Include provision in medium and short term plans, as appropriate.
- Review provision regularly.

## **Provision**

Where a student is more able in one or more areas, they will be supported with high expectations and planning within the classroom and outside to enable them to pursue work at their own level. Teachers will seek to use a variety of techniques and strategies to provide for the more able child. Planning for the more able child:

- Identifying provision for able students in subject policies and plans.
- Identifying clear stages of development in schemes of work.  
Restructuring class organisation or pupil groupings (setting, acceleration, fast tracking, compacting, early entry).
- Setting differentiated assignments.
- Planning a variety of extension and enrichment activities.
- Opportunities for creative and productive thinking.
- Problem solving and investigation to develop reasoning and thinking skills. Extending and enriching the curriculum.
- Clubs at lunchtime or after school, covering academic as well as other activities.
- Participation in special competitions.
- Consideration of the enrichment activities provided by outside agencies and organisations.

### **This process will include:**

- Observation and recording of progress across the curriculum.
- Encouraging students to assess and review their own performance.
- Valuing out-of-school achievements.
- Intervention activities to prevent underachievement.

#### **7. Advice /Further Supports**

**NCSE (National Council for Special Education)** ‘Exceptionally Able Additional Resources’

<https://www.sess.ie/categories/exceptionally-able/exceptionally-able/exceptionally-able-additional-resources>

**NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment)** Exceptionally Able Students

[https://ncca.ie/media/1974/exceptionally\\_able\\_students\\_draft\\_guidelines\\_for\\_teachers.pdf](https://ncca.ie/media/1974/exceptionally_able_students_draft_guidelines_for_teachers.pdf)

## Appendix 1: Policy Review Timeline

YEAR OF REVIEW:

Academic 2023/24

PROCESS STAGE	DATE	NOTES
<b>Identification Primary Planning Meeting- Focus Group</b>	November 2022- March 2023	Scoping documents and drafts AEN/ School Guidance and Senior Leadership Team
<b>Scoping document</b>	January 2023	Focus Group AEN Team Middle Leadership Team Parents' Association
<b>Circulation of discussion document to staff/BOM</b>	February-March 2023	BOM/SRC Staff Meeting
<b>Review by Planning Team</b>	February-August 2023	
<b>Consultation with Board of Management</b>	October 2023	
<b>Ratification and implementation date (BOM)</b>	17 <sup>th</sup> October 2023	Effective as ratified by BOM