Learning Support Policy

FEBRUARY 2010

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SERVICE ■ LEADERSHIP ■ JUSTICE
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1. RATIONALE

Inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that allows every individual to feel accepted, valued and safe. An inclusive community consciously evolves to meet the changing needs of its members. The school communities served by the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle embrace inclusion as a means of enhancing the well-being of every member of the community. By working together, we strengthen our capacity to provide the foundation for a richer future for us all.

The Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle has embraced the Salamanca Statement, adopted by UNESCO in 1994, as its framework for action in the area of developing inclusive school communities.

“The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive schools must recognise and respond to the diverse learning needs of their students, accommodating both the different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organisational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities. There should be a continuum of support and services to match the continuum of Learning Support encountered in every school.”

“The Catholic school... is a school for all.... it sets out to be a school for the human person and of human persons. The person of each individual human being, in his or her material and spiritual needs, is at the heart of Christ’s teaching.”

p 11, 18 From The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium Congregation for Catholic Education 1999.

For the purpose of this policy the term Learning Support refers to the support offered to those students who have additional needs.

1.1 The Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle Catholic Schools Office through this Learning Support Policy:
- recognises its responsibility for meeting the educational needs of all students
- strives for the development of schools that are inclusive
- aims to provide equity, access and participation for all students attending diocesan schools
- supports a collaborative approach with all stakeholders
- values the significant contribution made by classroom teachers

1.2 This policy reflects the Diocesan Strategic Vision, especially those ideals which:
- promote the active partnership of home, parish and school and recognises the family as the primary focus of the educational process
- recognise the individuality and dignity of each young person and foster the development of each one’s unique potential and spirituality
- develop a challenging, authentic and inclusive educational environment that encourages lifelong learning
- reflect gospel values of justice, truth, peace, forgiveness, love, reconciliation and service
2. **AIMS**

This policy aims to:

2.1. set direction for school based policies, procedures and practices in response to the Diocese’s philosophy of inclusion within schools and a learning support model that is focused on building capacity in schools to meet the learning, behavioural, social and emotional needs of students

2.2. guide individual schools in developing their own policies and procedures, which reflect this Policy

2.3. guide individual schools to establish genuine partnerships with parents / carers in meeting the needs of individual students

2.4. take into account relevant legislation and related standards in particular the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, the Disability Standards for Education 2005, the Catholic Schools Office Enrolment Policy and other relevant diocesan policies, and Diocesan Strategic Plan

3. **IMPLEMENTATION**

3.1 The **CATHOLIC SCHOOLS OFFICE** in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle will create a community of inclusive schools and model of school based Learning Support by:

3.1.1 increasing awareness at system and school level of the meaning and implications of inclusion and Learning Support through the publication of a Learning Support Policy, Enrolment Policy, Learning Support Handbook, Diocesan Programming Policy and other relevant documents

3.1.2 considering students with additional needs as an integral part of planning in all policies, procedures and initiatives

3.1.3 promoting best practice in leadership and management of resources at system and school level by monitoring learning support funding

3.1.4 planning for future educational directions and practices by analysing current research and trends, monitoring Diocesan practices, collaborating with external agencies, and supporting staff professional development

3.1.5 providing transparent and equitable distribution of government and diocesan funds to schools for students with additional or alternative needs

3.1.6 providing system structures and staffing through the Student Support Unit to support schools in achieving quality teaching and learning for all

3.1.7 providing psychological services for every school

3.1.8 providing a Learning Support Teacher (0.2 – 1.0 FTE) in every primary school

3.1.9 providing a Learning Support Coordinator (1.0 FTE) in every secondary school, and additional Learning Support teaching staff as needed

3.1.10 providing schools with a Learning Support package which includes the provision of Learning Support Assistants as determined by the needs of the school
3.1.11 providing a framework for Professional Development and Parent Education to build capacity in schools. This includes:

- providing teachers without formal Special Education qualifications with the opportunity to undertake the Diocesan developed Mini Certificate in Special Needs
- supporting Learning Support teachers who have completed the Mini-Certificate to obtain a Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies (Special Education)
- providing Professional Development for current and aspiring school Executive Staff to provide a positive inclusive school climate
- providing Professional Development for classroom teachers and Learning Support Assistants
- providing opportunities for Parent Information sessions

3.1.12 Establishing processes that:

3.1.12.1 ensure induction procedures acquaint new members of staff and new members of school executive with the philosophy of inclusion and school based Learning Support

3.1.12.2 ensure staff appointed to Learning Support teaching positions hold post graduate qualifications in Special Education or equivalent

3.2 SCHOOL COMMUNITIES will, with support, demonstrate their ability to cater for students with additional needs in an inclusive environment by:

3.2.1 developing a school based Learning Support Policy and annually reviewed Learning Support Plan by:

3.2.1.1 consulting with relevant members of their school community

3.2.1.2 developing curriculum initiatives that cater for the diverse needs of learners

3.2.1.3 establishing school based programs, processes and strategies for students with additional needs as directed by the NSW Board of Studies and ongoing Diocesan regulations and requirements

3.2.2 establishing and properly resourcing a Learning Support Team, which includes a member of the Executive, and ensuring that the team works collaboratively with members of the school community

3.2.3 following procedures as set out in the Diocesan Enrolment Policy (1999) and the support document Guidelines for the Enrolment of Students with Learning Support (2007)

3.2.4 working within guidelines as indicated in the Learning Support Handbook

3.2.5 creating an environment that celebrates diversity and provides an education program with an expectation that all students will achieve individual success through access to a variety of appropriate programs
3.2.6 encouraging staff to seek and participate in relevant professional development opportunities

3.2.7 ensuring all staff are familiar with and work within the Disability Standards for Education 2005

3.2.8 consulting with and offering ongoing education for parents, caregivers and students

3.2.9 building capacity of all staff through the Learning Support Team

3.2.10 implementing programs and strategies to enhance learning for students with additional needs

3.2.11 ensuring that Individual Plans (IP) are developed, implemented, and reviewed for all students with disabilities and other identified students with additional needs

3.2.12 ensuring appropriate assessment and reporting occurs for students with additional needs

3.2.13 ensuring inclusion in state wide and diocesan testing programs occurs where appropriate

3.2.14 ensuring that the resources provided in the Learning Support Package are used to meet the specific identified needs of students with additional needs

3.2.15 conducting an annual review of the school’s Learning Support Package and its implementation within the school.

4. BUDGET

4.1 The Catholic Schools Office will support the implementation of this policy by allocating a proportion of its budget to the provision of services for students with additional needs. This may include staffing, professional development and / or resources.

4.2 Targeted funding from State and Commonwealth governments will be directed to support school based programs and / or resources for students with additional needs.

4.3 The Budget allocation is reviewed by a representative group under the authorisation of the Director on an annual basis and future recommendations are made.

5. EVALUATION

5.1 Evaluation of the policy will be undertaken in the latter half of 2012 and thereafter every three years

5.2 Evaluation will be undertaken by a representative group under the authorisation of the Head of Teaching & Learning Services

5.3 The evaluation will examine the effectiveness of the policy based on comments from relevant parties.
6. GLOSSARY

Additional Needs: For the purposes of this Policy the term additional needs refers to those students who require support to maximise their educational participation and learning outcomes regardless of cause. This includes students funded under Students with Disability program. It may also include students with language difficulties, literacy and / or numeracy difficulties, those who are gifted or talented or those experiencing emotional, social or behavioural difficulties.

Commonwealth Funding: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) outlines the criteria for eligibility for funding under this program. For more information see the Students with Disabilities (SWD) Handbook.

Inclusion: Inclusion is a philosophy that influences our beliefs and underpins what we do in our efforts to support students with additional or alternative needs. The philosophy of inclusion is that schools have a responsibility to meet the needs of all students, that teachers will differentiate and must adjust curriculum, instruction, access and participation strategies to suit the differing needs and abilities of each student in the classroom and school environment. From this has come the development of principles of inclusive education to facilitate the movement from philosophy to practice.

Individual Plan: The development of an Individual Plan (IP) is a process that targets the specific learning needs of individual students. The term IP is inclusive of all IPs developed to support students, for example: Individual Education Plan (IEP), Individual Behaviour Plan (IBP), and Health Care Management Plan (HCMP). As per IP Guidelines the process requires the coming together of persons involved with the student to work collaboratively to set goals and develop actions and strategies necessary for the implementation of the plan, taking into consideration the needs of the student. The IP will contain identified long and short-term goals, the strategies to be employed, the personnel required to implement the plan, appropriate resourcing and a time line for implementation and review.

Learning Support: Learning Support encompasses the academic, social, behavioural and emotional needs of students. It targets processes and resources that enable students with additional needs to participate meaningfully within the school community.

Learning Support Teacher / Learning Support Coordinator: All primary schools employ a Learning Support Teacher, and all secondary schools employ a Learning Support Coordinator. The primary role of the Learning Support Teacher / Coordinator is to assist Class Teachers to identify individual student needs and to design, develop, implement, monitor and evaluate curricula plans and programs for identified students. They may coordinate the school Learning Support Team and may act as the primary point of contact for Catholic Schools Office Education Officers (Student Support) and external service providers. They may have the responsibility to organise, conduct, minute and provide the follow-up for IP meetings and student reviews. They may be responsible for selecting and utilising diagnostic assessment measures to identify levels of student learning. (See Role Statement).

Learning Support Assistant: The Learning Support Assistant is responsible to the school Principal, and either the Learning Support Teacher or Learning Support Coordinator, and is supported by the Catholic Schools Office Student Support Unit. Responsibility for enabling the learning of students with identified special needs lies with the Class Teacher. Under the supervision and direction of the Class Teacher, a Learning Support Assistant is responsible for providing support and assistance in school routines; classroom activities; and the care and management of students with special needs.
**Learning Support Team:** The Learning Support Team functions as an intervention group that links all school resources, processes relevant referrals, and discusses identified issues to target the support of students with academic, social, emotional, or behavioural needs. Membership of the team must consist of Learning Support Coordinator / Teacher, member of the School Executive, School Psychologist and other relevant staff.

**Learning Support Package:** Every school receives a Learning Support Package, and Guidelines for the use of Learning Support Packages. The Learning Support Package provides information about the Learning Support teaching staff, and the amount of funding available for Students with Disabilities (SWD) and General Learning Support (GLS) for a twelve month period.
7. REFERENCES

Disability Discrimination Act, 1992, Commonwealth of Australia

Disability Standards for Education, October 2005, Commonwealth of Australia

Vision Statement for Catholic Schools, Revised 2003, Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle

Strategic Plan 2010-2012

Salamanca Statement 1994

8. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

IEP Guidelines

Learning Support Handbook

Role Statements: Learning Support Teacher / Coordinator / Assistant / School Psychologist / Education Officer

Diocesan Enrolment Policy (Amended 2010)

Programming K – 12 Policy 2007

Guidelines for the Enrolment / Transition of Students with Special Needs 2007