

Overview



Draft Guidelines

for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities



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Message

The development of *Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities* marks a significant milestone in Special Education in Ireland.

The Education Act (1998), which established the NCCA as a statutory body, makes particular reference to the role of the Council in advising the Minister for Education and Science on curriculum for students with a disability or other special educational need. These guidelines, issued for consultation, represent Council's first step towards fulfilling this function.

Students with general learning disabilities (severe/profound, moderate and mild) comprise the largest group within the special education student cohort. In addition, further work is planned to provide support for teachers working with adolescents whose learning needs are focused on personal, social and vocational skills.

Work is already underway or about to commence on the next phase of development—guidelines for teachers of students with a range of specific learning difficulties, and for teachers of students who are exceptionally able.

These draft guidelines have drawn on the best of current practice in Ireland and abroad, and on the most recent research into the learning needs of students with

general learning disabilities. They reflect the recent and proposed legislative framework for special education. The consultative process which followed the publication of the NCCA's discussion paper on special educational need (1999) was also significant in giving direction to the work.

The drafting of the guidelines has been a partnership process—teachers, parents, principals, school management, and a wide range of specialists in the field, have all contributed to the work as it unfolded. The time and effort given by so many to this project is evidence of their commitment to provide the highest quality educational experiences for children and young people with general learning disabilities.

In preparing the final drafts for consultation, NCCA was fortunate to have a team of education officers with extensive expertise and experience in the field of special education and commitment to ensuring that the inclusiveness of the developmental process was reflected in the final product.

The consultative process initiated on the publication of these guidelines will result in a revised set of guidelines being made available to schools and teachers. I invite you to share your expertise and experience—as a teacher, as a parent, as a principal, as a health professional, as a member of the special needs community—over the course of this consultative process to shape these guidelines into a lasting and valuable resource.

Introduction

THE BROAD AIMS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

The broad aims of education for students with special educational needs reflect those that are relevant to all students and include

- enabling the student to live a full life and to realise his or her potential as a unique individual through access to an appropriate broad and balanced curriculum
- enabling the student to function as independently as possible in society through the provision of such educational supports as are necessary to realise that potential
- enabling the student to continue learning in adult life.

The student's wider environment is, of course, a powerful factor in the student's learning. Close co-operation between home and school is essential if the student is to experience the full benefit of his/her education.

THE PURPOSES OF THE GUIDELINES

These curriculum guidelines are intended to support the planning and implementation of the curriculum for students with severe/profound, moderate and mild general learning disabilities. They can be used in mainstream and special primary and post-primary schools, and all other settings in which these students

receive their education. They are intended for use by all teachers involved in the education of the student, and should also be accessible to parents and other non-teaching personnel directly involved with the student's education. They should be used in conjunction with the mainstream curriculum where possible and should be a valuable resource for schools in developing and revising their school plan.

A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

While professional responsibility for the education of the student lies with the class teacher and school principal, teachers working with students with general learning disabilities are often called upon to work collaboratively with personnel from other disciplines. The particularly strong need for consistency of approach for these students makes consultation and collaboration, with parents and other people involved in their care and education, essential.





Structure of the guidelines

The documentation is divided into three main books. These are presented as a suite and represent a continuum of provision. For ease of use, each book generally relates to a category of disabilities, but teachers should remember that they might need to access more than one book, depending on the student's strengths and needs.

These guidelines are intended for use alongside the mainstream curriculum, and access to the mainstream curriculum should be facilitated, as a priority, where possible.

Book 1 has been designed for teachers of students with severe and profound general learning disabilities.

Book 2 has been designed for teachers of students with moderate general learning disabilities.

Book 3 has been designed for teachers of students with mild general learning disabilities.

The curriculum for primary and post-primary education is constructed around curriculum areas (primary) or areas of experience (post-primary). The six curriculum areas outlined in the primary school curriculum and the eight areas of experience outlined at junior cycle are designed as a framework for a broad and balanced curriculum.

All curriculum areas can be used to increase the student's overall understanding of his/her environment, while also providing enriching opportunities for addressing priority needs. A balance should be maintained between individual and group activities, giving consideration to the student's need for one-to-one attention and also his/her need to develop social skills.

While the focus and breakdown of educational outcomes in each of the three books reflect the developmental, social and personal needs of students with general learning disabilities, the student's educational experience should reflect what is available to his/her peers. Access to a broad and balanced curriculum opens up exciting possibilities for new experiences.

Book 1

Severe/Profound
General Learning Disabilities



Book 2

Moderate
General Learning Disabilities



Book 3

Mild
General Learning Disabilities



**Primary
Curriculum**



**Post-Primary
Curriculum**



BOOK I

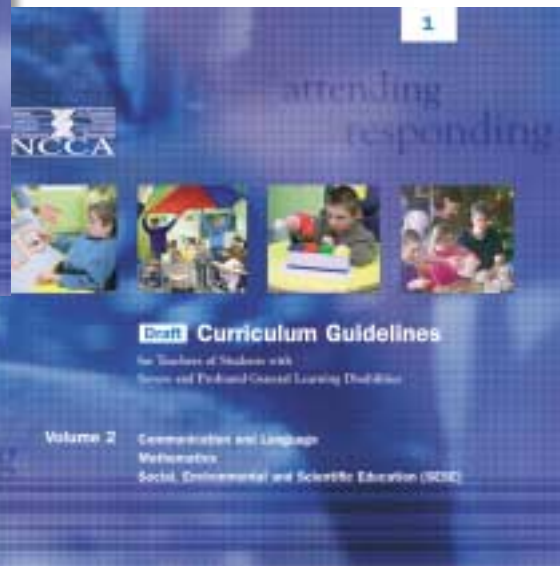
Severe/Profound General Learning Disabilities

Volume 1 Teacher Guidelines



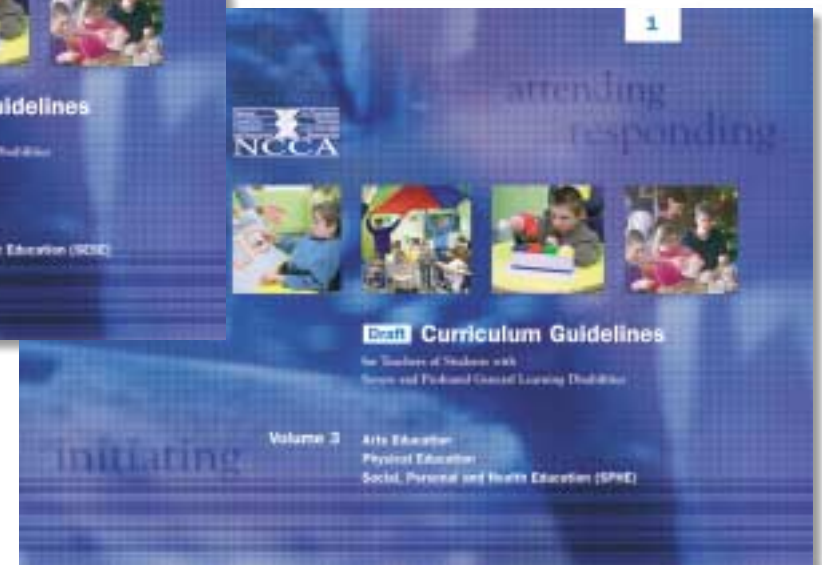
Volume 2

- Communication and language**
- Mathematics**
- Social, Environmental and Scientific Education**



Volume 3

- Arts Education**
- Physical Education**
- Social, Personal and Health Education**



Book I has been designed for use with students who have a severe or profound general learning disabilities. These students receive their education in a wide range of settings including special schools, mainstream schools, and residential or day care settings.

Enabling the student to attend to people and things in his/her own environment is an underlying aim of Book I, and each curriculum area should offer opportunities to develop the ability to attend.

Encouraging students to move from a passive to a responsive and interactive role, in which they initiate activities and communication, will also be a crucial element of each learning activity. Opportunities for choice and control are essential.

Curriculum is presented in three bands:

- an *Attending* band, which provides for students who are in the very early stages of awareness of the immediate environment
- a *Responding* band, which provides for students who are taking an interest in their environment, but who still need prompting and adult initiation of activities and communication
- an *Initiating* band, which provides for those students who are beginning to control their environment, develop curiosity, and initiate activities and communication.

The image displays two pages from a curriculum document for 'Communication and language'.

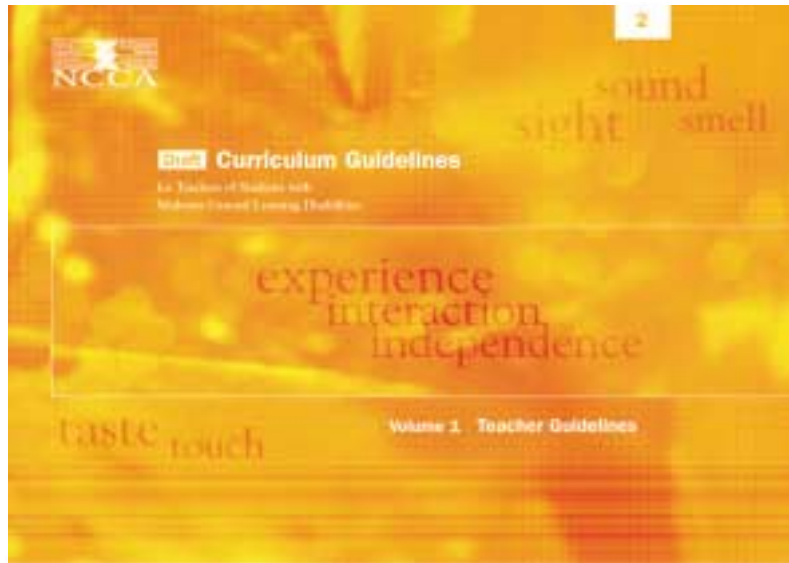
Page 1 (Left): A table with three columns: **Attending**, **Responding**, and **Initiating**. Each column has two rows of text under the heading 'Receptive and expressive language'. The text describes specific skills and behaviors for students in each band.

Page 2 (Right): A page titled '1 attending responding initiating' with an 'Introduction' section. The text discusses the importance of communication and language development for students with severe and profound general learning disabilities. It mentions that the term 'language' generally implies verbal communication, and that the curriculum addresses verbal and non-verbal methods of receiving and giving information. It also notes that the development of communication and language takes place within a more general framework of social interaction.

BOOK 2

Moderate General Learning Disabilities

Volume 1 Teacher Guidelines



Volume 2

Communication and language
Mathematics
Social, Environmental and Scientific Education



Volume 3

Arts Education
Physical Education
Social, Personal and Health Education



Book 2 has been designed for teachers of students with moderate general learning disabilities. At present, most of these students attend special schools, but increasing numbers of students are enrolled in mainstream primary or post-primary schools.

While these students have very individual learning needs, it is important that their educational experience reflects what is available to their peers. Students with moderate general learning disabilities generally need explicit teaching in relation to concepts and skills that are usually acquired before school age. They may also experience difficulty in processing input from more than one sense at a time, and need encouragement to initiate activities and develop communication skills.

Curriculum in each subject area is presented as a continuum or line of development, and indicates the scope of activities in which students can be engaged. The mini-exemplars that accompany each learning outcome show how the curriculum can be implemented in different contexts with a range of students. Teachers are encouraged to find a suitable entry point for each of their students. The initial exemplars illustrate activities suited to the early learner. Because students with moderate general learning disabilities will move along the continuum at very different rates, suggestions are offered on how older students can continue to revisit initial skills with more age-appropriate materials and contexts.

The image shows a page from a curriculum document. The page is titled "2 experience interaction independence" at the top right. The main heading is "Communication and language". Below this, there is a table with three columns, each containing learning outcomes for "Thoughtful and expressive language".

Thoughtful and expressive language	Thoughtful and expressive language	Thoughtful and expressive language
<p>Creates like-like play or soundly from face and sound to similar sounds in the immediate environment – whistles, bells, noises connected with routine activities such as eating the table for lunch or noise linked to key activities</p> <p>Looks intently to and from an or track sounds in familiar surroundings environment, locate sounds made with vision, touch out of vision – sound played above, below and behind student</p> <p>Independently focus on and track sounds that interest teacher, show the attention of others to sounds made or outside the classroom</p> <p>Respond to hearing own name</p> <p>(See Main: Listening and responding)</p>	<p>Listen to a wide range of sounds in more to the immediate, distant and mechanical sounds in the environment, personal instruments, for music</p> <p>Listen to identify and communicate with increasing awareness about sounds in the environment, not only words or pictures in identify and or recorded sounds – telephones, intercoms, alarm clocks, car jelling, car horns blowing, dogs barking, babies crying</p> <p>Listen attentively and selectively to sounds in familiar surroundings and wider environment, identify familiar words or signs, show to repeat words</p> <p>(See Main: Listening and Responding)</p>	<p>Place them clearly and surely according to a differentiated environment, to attending in settings with distractions</p> <p>Discriminate sounds of widely differing intensity, about of multiple sound</p> <p>Recognize words in the wider environment, recognize systems and of television programmes</p> <p>Participate in more challenging listening activities, first given without sound track to what, represent objects creating one sound – for the student to identify the missing sound</p> <p>Listen to contrasting sounds and vibrations, self voice and, long or short, short, different noise makes</p> <p>(See Main: Listening and Responding)</p>

On the right side of the page, there is a sidebar with the heading "Communication and language" and a sub-heading "Communication and language". It contains text about the importance of communication and language for students with moderate general learning disabilities, and mentions that the text is available in Braille and large print.

Mild General Learning Disabilities

Teacher Guidelines



Primary

English Communication and language

Mathematics

Social, Environmental and Scientific Education

Physical Education

Music

Gaeilge Teanga agus Cultúr

Social, Personal and Health Education

Visual Arts

Drama



Post-Primary

Mathematical Studies and Applications

Language, Literature and Communication

Social, Political and Environmental Education



Book 3 has been designed for teachers of students with mild general learning disabilities. These students may be in special schools, in special classes in mainstream schools, or integrated into mainstream classes at primary and post-primary levels. The guidelines aim to provide educational experiences for these students that will be meaningful, manageable and relevant, and will enable them to access all areas of the mainstream curriculum through strategies of teaching and learning characterised by high levels of differentiation.

The guidelines offer all schools a framework within which they can review and develop curriculum provision in a way that is relevant to the needs of these students and consistent with the general principles of education for all students.

Obtaining access to a broad and balanced curriculum allows possibilities for a wide range of experiences. These experiences can be used to develop the student's skills and abilities across a wide range of competencies and thereby enable them to communicate and function as independently as possible in school and in adult and working life.



Consultation

The consultative documents will be widely circulated and will also be available on CD-ROM and on the NCCA website: www.ncca.ie. It is expected that the period of consultation will extend to early 2003.

The consultation process will involve the provision of response forms and the convening of consultative meetings with a wide range of groups working with students with general learning disabilities. The consultative process will focus on a range of issues including

- breadth and balance of the guidelines
- the suitability of teaching approaches and methodologies
- the resources necessary to implement the guidelines
- the views of parents
- the implications of the guidelines for the professional development of teachers.

The guidelines will be redrafted in the light of this feedback and will be issued to schools in September 2003.

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