

# **Special Educational Needs and Learning Difficulties Policy**

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**Withington Girls' School**

**September 2025**

## **Background**

This is the Special Educational Needs and Learning Difficulties Policy for Withington Girls' School (School).

This policy is designed to provide a framework to manage Special Educational Needs (**SEN**) and Learning Difficulties (**LDD**) in both the Junior and Senior School.

The provision for support of SEN and LDD within the context of the School aims to encourage all girls to achieve academically in line with their ability, to thrive socially and in extra-curricular activities in order to fulfil their potential. The School aims to promote inclusion and access to the curriculum, whilst embracing diversity and caring for the needs of each individual.

## **Aims and Objectives**

The aims and objectives of this policy are as follows:

- To promote good practice in the detection and management of SEN.
- To explain the support the School can provide for children who have LDD and the co-operation needed from parents.
- To contribute to an environment in which all pupils are intellectually challenged through academic study, stimulated through extra-curricular activities, and encouraged to achieve their best throughout the Junior and Senior Schools.
- To develop procedures and practices, which will enable the identification, assessment and subsequent monitoring of the needs of individual pupils.
- To establish ways to facilitate the monitoring, evaluation and review of SEN and LDD provision, and to link this, as far as possible, to other assessment and reporting on pupils.
- To provide in-service training for staff through the means of both inside and outside agencies, in order to encourage awareness and respect for individual differences and varying ways of learning. It is aimed to encourage all staff to take responsibility for contributing to the education of children with SEN and LDD, and to continue to develop differentiated approaches to meet those needs.
- To keep staff informed and updated concerning developments in this area.
- To involve parents of pupils with SEN or LDD and to encourage them to assume partnership with the School in the education of their children.
- To report to parents on the implementation of this policy.
- To build up effective links with outside bodies to enhance the quality of the provision.
- To actively promote the well-being of pupils.
- To create a whole school culture of openness safety, equality and protection.

## **Publication and Availability**

This policy is published on the School website.

The policy is available in hard copy on request.

A copy of the policy is available for inspection from the School Office during the School day. The policy is can be made available in large print or other accessible format if required.

## Regulatory framework

This policy has been prepared to meet the School's responsibilities under:

- Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014;
- Education and Skills Act 2008;
- Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulation (**UK GDPR**);
- Equality Act 2010; and
- Children and Families Act 2014.

This policy has regard to the following guidance and advice:

- Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years (DfE and Department of Health, April 2015) (**Code of Practice**);
- Keeping children safe in education (DfE, September 2025);
- Equality Act 2010: advice for schools (DfE, May 2014, updated June 2018).

The following School policies, procedures and resource materials are relevant to this policy:

- equal opportunities policy
- safeguarding and child protection policy and procedures;
- risk assessment policy for pupil welfare;
- anti-bullying policy;
- behaviour and discipline policy;
- English as an additional language policy;
- attendance policy;
- admissions policy;
- relationships education and relationships and sex education policy; and
- accessibility plan.

## Definitions

The following definitions should be noted when reading this policy:

References to the **Board of Governors** are references to the proprietor of the School.

References to an **Individual Education Plan (IEP)** are references to a plan or programme designed for children with SEN to help them to get the most out of their education. An IEP builds on the curriculum that a child with learning difficulties or disabilities is following and sets out the strategies being used to meet that child's specific needs.

References to **working days** mean Monday to Friday, when the School is open during term time. The dates of terms are published on the School's website.

## "Special educational needs" and "learning difficulty"

Children have Special Educational Needs (**SEN**) if they have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them. Children have a Learning Difficulty (**LDD**) if they:

- have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age; or
- have a disability which prevents or hinders the child from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of the same age in mainstream schools or mainstream post 16 institutions

A child must not be regarded as having a learning difficulty solely because the language or form of language in which he or she is or will be taught is different from a language or form of language which is or has been spoken at home. However, children for whom English is an additional language will be provided with appropriate support. Please see the School's English as an additional language policy.

A child who finds a particular subject difficult does not necessarily have a "learning difficulty" in the legal sense of that expression; there will often be disparities in the speed with which children learn, in their skill at solving problems and in aptitude generally.

The expression "learning difficulty" covers a wide variety of conditions and may include those known as dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia, attention deficit (hyperactivity) disorder, semantic processing difficulty and learning problems which result from social, emotional or mental health difficulties. The expression may also include those who have problems with their eyesight or hearing or who have an autistic spectrum disorder.

Learning difficulties may affect children who have a high IQ and academic ability as well as those of lower IQ and ability. Sometimes a child's learning difficulty becomes apparent for the first time at the age of 11+ or older, when the educational pressures tend to increase.

### **Responsibility arrangements for co-ordinating SEN/LDD provision**

The Board of Governors has overall responsibility for all matters which are the subject of this policy.

The Head has an overview of the SEN/LDD provision and there is a nominated Governor who liaises with the Head of Learning Support on a regular basis.

### **Learning Support Staff**

The Department comprises the Head of Learning Support and three additional learning support staff.

### **The Head of Learning Support is responsible for:**

- Liaising with the Head, Deputy Heads, the Head of the Junior School, Heads of Department, Heads of Year and Form Tutors and the School Nurse, as appropriate, both formally and informally.
- The day-to-day operation of this policy.
- Reporting on SEN/LDD issues regularly in staff meetings and Heads of Department meetings.

- Ensuring that relevant background information about individual children with SEN and LDD is collected, recorded and updated.
- Overseeing records of pupils with SEN and LDD, making appropriate use of ICT facilities.
- Ensuring that appropriate IEPs are in place and effectively implemented. See below for further information on IEPs.
- Monitoring, evaluating, reviewing and amending of IEPs in consultation with parents, Form Tutor and any interested member(s) of staff.
- Liaising with the Heads of English and Mathematics regarding arrangements for entrance examinations.
- Liaising with other professionals in respect of a child's SEN e.g. external contacts and support services.
- Advising and supporting other staff in the School.
- Contributing to in-service training of staff.
- Monitoring continuing professional development of all members of the SEN Department, including personal regular attendance at national conferences.
- Liaising with parents of children with SEN or LDD.
- Liaising with the Examinations Officers and monitoring provision of extra time for internal and public examinations for SEN and LDD pupils where necessary.
- Liaising with SENCOs/Heads of Learning Support from other schools.
- Updating related policies where appropriate.
- Monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of SEN and LDD provision at regular intervals.
- Undertaking any other appropriate duties in accordance with the Code of Practice.

**All teaching staff are responsible for:**

- Being aware of SEN and LDD pupils' individual needs.
- Ensuring that they have appropriate and up-to date knowledge, implementing suitable strategies in the classroom and positively reinforcing SEN and LDD pupils in this context.
- Liaising with Learning Support staff to identify areas of difficulty in their subject areas and agreeing appropriate targets with the Head of Learning Support.

**Admission Arrangements**

Admission to the School is selective, based on:

- Entrance Examination;
- Interview; and
- Feeder School Reference.

Reasonable adjustments will be made where appropriate to ensure that the Admissions procedure is accessible to those with SEN or LDD. Provision will be planned in consultation with the parents.

Candidates sit papers in English (Comprehension and Essay), Mathematics (Mechanical and Problem-solving) and Verbal and Non-verbal Reasoning. All papers aim to uncover potential rather than merely to measure attainment. The papers are numerically marked, but specific strengths

and weaknesses are often identified on an individual basis (e.g. problems with timing, an ability to apply principles or to make connections). The scripts are marked blind, and any indication of SEN or LDD informs subsequent review and discussion of results. If any candidate is identified as having SEN or LDD at this stage, the Head of Learning Support is involved and provision planned.

Further details are contained in the admissions policy.

### **Specialist Provision and Contacts**

Learning Support Staff maintain up-to-date records regarding professional bodies from which they may seek information and advice, and which may also be of assistance in the cases of individual pupils. Parents are required to provide this information as part of the School's admissions process.

### **Identification, Assessment and Provision**

The School's approach to the detection and management of SEN and LDD will be guided by the Code of Practice.

As part of the Assess-Plan-Do-Review Model and to ensure collaborative working, the School works closely with parents of children who have or may have SEN and LDD to assess and review a pupil's needs and support. Parents are kept informed concerning assessment, planning, provision and review of their child's education.

### **Identification of Pupils with a Learning Difficulty**

- Learning Support Staff liaise with colleagues from the Junior School and from external primary schools in identifying those pupils who are already identified as having SEN prior to entry into the Junior and Senior Schools.
- Parents are required to indicate on the Application Form for admission to the School if their daughter has a SEN or any LDD and to provide copies of any report or recommendations which have been made in relation to SEN at their child's previous school or elsewhere within the last 12 months. Confidential information of this kind will only be shared within the School on a "need to know basis".
- Other assessment procedures (e.g. professionally assessed standardised test in Year 7, MidYIS, YELLIS and ALIS tests) are employed to identify any potential need SEN/LDD provision.
- Subject teachers inform Learning Support Staff of concerns regarding individual pupils.
- Pupil progress and engagement is monitored, by way of written reports, SchoolBase records, pupil profiling and PSHCE sessions on study skills, and, if the outcome of a test or any other circumstance(s) give(s) us reason to think that a pupil may have a learning difficulty, we will report and consult with the pupil's parents as necessary and make recommendations about further assessment and support.
- Concerns formulated by parents or pupils, through meetings, letters or profiling may help identify areas to be addressed.
- If a parent or teacher expresses any concern that a girl may have a LDD or SEN, the Head of Learning Support will be informed immediately. The Form Tutor or Head of Year will then obtain further information for discussion with the Head of Learning Support and the pupil's parents if necessary and make recommendations about further assessment and support. If necessary, informal assessments will be carried out by a member of the Learning Support staff (e.g. spelling tests, GL assessment Dyslexia screening).

## **Formal Assessment**

- The Head of Learning Support will communicate openly with parents as soon as a concern is expressed so that School and the parents can work through the matter together.
- If there are indications that a pupil may have a learning difficulty, the Head of Learning Support will ask the pupil's parents to agree to the pupil being formally assessed outside school by an educational psychologist or appropriate professional where appropriate. The parents may consult an educational psychologist retained by the School, or one of their own choice. The cost in either case must be borne by the parents.
- The School will endeavour to follow any recommendations from that assessment, subject to agreement as to any additional fees payable. See Learning Support below.
- A written copy of any outside report must be made available to the School and will be kept on the girl's personal file and the Head of Learning Support's file.

## **Learning Support**

- Once pupils' SEN or LDD have been identified and assessed, parents are informed of the issue by the Head of Learning Support and a strategy is devised to take suitable action to assist the pupils' development, subject to agreement as to any additional fees payable. An appropriate record is kept and an IEP drawn up for certain pupils. Pupils contribute to the regular review of their progress that is undertaken. Teaching staff have access to the profiles of the SEN or LDD of the pupils involved. See 'Individual Education Plan' below.
- As part of a graduated approach, the School may suggest a course of additional specialist teaching by a qualified specialist on a one-to-one basis in school. This would normally be one period of 30 - 40 minutes per week during term time.
- If there are indications that a pupil may have a learning difficulty but the circumstances are not such as to indicate an immediate formal assessment or a course of additional specialist teaching is required, the School may suggest that the pupil gives up one of the normal curriculum subjects and instead attends learning support for specialist teaching or structured study time.
- Learning support of this kind will be arranged, subject to prior agreement being reached with the parent as to the charging arrangement for this.
- The pupil's progress and needs will be monitored and, if necessary, the School will recommend a formal assessment if the learning support provided does not appear to be meeting the pupil's needs or where it is required for the purposes of applying for exam access arrangements. See Examinations below.
- Parents bear the overall responsibility for taking decisions about the management of their child's LDD. A parent who would prefer to have a formal assessment instead of learning support should make arrangements accordingly with the School or outside, as appropriate. In these circumstances parents must ensure that the School and the Head of Learning Support is given copies of all advice and reports received.

## **External Teaching**

Parents may opt for additional specialist teaching outside the School, provided that the Headmistress is satisfied with your child's safety and travel arrangements and also that the

additional specialist teaching is at times which fit in with the remainder of the curriculum, timetable and community life of the School.

### **Examinations**

Pupils who have been diagnosed as having a learning difficulty may be eligible for extra time and / or other "access arrangements" to complete internal examinations and public examinations.

Parents are asked to liaise with the Head of Learning Support in good time with respect to this.

### **Information sharing and parent involvement**

New parents are asked to complete a form to gather key background information which may be relevant and to provide copies of any report or recommendations which have been made in relation to special educational needs at their child's previous school or elsewhere within the last 12 months. Confidential information of this kind will only be shared within the School on a "need to know" basis.

The School will do all that is reasonable to report and consult with parents about their child's learning difficulties and to ensure that teachers are given any necessary information about a child's learning difficulties and that teaching practices are appropriate.

Parents should notify the School immediately if their child's progress or behaviour causes concern so that the School can devise and agree a strategy with the parents.

Parents bear the overall responsibility for taking decisions about the management of their child's learning difficulties. A parent who would prefer to have a formal assessment instead of learning support should make arrangements accordingly with the School or outside, as appropriate. In these circumstances parents must ensure that the School and the Head of Learning Support is given copies of all advice and reports received.

### **Individual Education Plan**

The Head of Learning Support will ensure that an appropriate IEP is in place where required.

The IEP will be prepared in consultation with the parents and, if appropriate, the pupil and will include:

- the adjustments, interventions and support required to meet the outcomes identified for the pupil;
- the expected impact on the pupil's progress, development or behaviour, as appropriate; and
- clear dates for review.

In carrying out the review, the Head of Learning Support will consider:

- the effectiveness of the support and interventions and their impact on the pupil's progress;
- the views of relevant teaching staff, the parents and, if appropriate, the pupil; and
- any changes that are required to the support and outcomes set out for the pupil.

### **Education, Health and Care Plans (EHC Plan)**

Parents and the School have the right, under section 36(1) of the Children and Families Act 2014 to ask the local authority to make an assessment with a view to drawing up an EHC plan. The School will always consult with parents before exercising this right. If the local authority refuses to make an assessment, the parents (but not the School) have a right of appeal to the First-tier Tribunal (Special Educational Needs and Disability).

Where a prospective pupil has an EHC plan, the School will consult with the parents and where, appropriate, the local authority to ensure that the provision specified in the EHC plan can be delivered by the School. The School will co-operate with the local authority to ensure that relevant reviews of EHC plans are carried out as required.

Any additional services that are needed to meet the requirements of the EHC plan will be charged to the local authority if the authority is responsible for the fees and our school is named in Section I of the EHC plan. In all other circumstances the School will agree the charging arrangements with the parents(s) with regard to the provisions of the Equality Act 2010, where applicable.

### **Access to the Curriculum**

It is expected that all pupils with SEN and LDD should have full access to the curriculum, and benefit from the full range of extra-curricular activities, which represent a major catalyst for the self-expression and development of pupils. All pupils are taught within mainstream classes, where skilful differentiation should ensure that all pupils are catered for. Where appropriate, additional 1:1 support and extra support groups targeted at a range of needs are organised by the Learning Support Department.

### **Additional Welfare Needs**

The School recognises that pupils with SEN or LDD may be at risk of being bullied. The School has an anti-bullying policy which makes it clear that bullying behaviour of any kind is not acceptable and will be taken very seriously. If parents are concerned about their child's welfare they can approach the pupil's form teacher or any senior member of staff to discuss their concerns in private at any time.

The School will tackle inappropriate attitudes and practices through staff leading by example, through the personal, social, health, citizenship and economic (PSHCE), relationships education / relationships and sex education programmes, through the supportive School culture and through the School's policies.

When teaching pupils about safeguarding, the School recognises that a one size fits all approach may not be appropriate for all pupils and will consider whether it should adopt a more contextualised approach for some pupils with special educational needs or disabilities.

If parents are concerned about their child's welfare they can approach the pupil's form teacher or any senior member of staff to discuss their concerns in private at any time.

Additional barriers can exist when detecting the abuse or neglect of pupils with SEN, disability or certain medical or physical health conditions that can create additional safeguarding challenges both online and offline for those involved in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of this group of children. The School is mindful in particular that these may include:

- assumptions that indicators of possible abuse such as behaviour, mood and injury relate to the pupil's condition without further exploration;

- pupils with a SEN, disability or certain health conditions may be more prone to peer group isolation and can be disproportionately impacted by bullying (including prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying) without outwardly showing any signs;
- some pupils may be unable to understand the difference between fact and fiction in online content and can repeat the content / behaviour in school without understanding the consequences; and
- there may be communication barriers which are difficult to overcome to identify whether action under this policy is required.

The School should consider providing extra pastoral support and attention for these pupils, along with ensuring any appropriate support for communication is in place.

Any report of abuse involving children with SEND will require close liaison with the designated safeguarding lead (or deputy) and the Head of Learning Support.

Any safeguarding concerns will be dealt with in accordance with the procedures set out in the School's child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures.

### **Disability**

The School recognises that some pupils with SEN or LDD may also have a disability. Pupils and parents are referred to the School's equal opportunities for pupils policy.

The School will make all reasonable adjustments in order to afford opportunity to disabled pupils. However if, despite such adjustments, the School is unable to provide adequately for the pupil's needs, the School may decline to offer a place to a pupil or request that parents withdraw their child from the School. See Alternative arrangement below.

### **Alternative Arrangements**

We reserve the right, following consultation with you, to ask or require you to withdraw your child from the School if:

- your child is in need of a formal assessment, additional specialist teaching, learning support or medication to which you do not consent; and / or
- you have deliberately withheld from the School information which prevents it from effectively addressing your child's LDD; and /or
- your child's learning difficulties require a level of support or medication which, in the professional judgment of the Headmistress, the School is unable to provide, manage or arrange; and / or
- your child has special educational needs that make it unlikely she will be able to benefit sufficiently from the mainstream education and facilities which we provide.

In any of these circumstances we will do what is reasonable to help you to find an alternative placement which will provide your child with the necessary level of teaching and support.

Withdrawal of a pupil in these circumstances will not incur a charge to fees in lieu of notice. The deposit paid in respect of your child will be credited to your account.

### **Training**

- The School ensures that regular guidance and training is arranged on induction and at regular intervals thereafter so that staff and volunteers understand what is expected of them by this policy and have the necessary knowledge and skills to carry out their roles.
- The level and frequency of training depends on role of the individual member of staff.
- In turn, the Learning Support Staff provide or arrange for development for other teaching staff through meetings, CPD activities and in other appropriate contexts.
- The School maintains written records of all staff training.

### **Risk Assessment**

Where a concern about a pupil's welfare is identified, the risks to that pupil's welfare will be assessed and appropriate action will be taken to reduce the risks identified.

The format of risk assessment may vary and may be included as part of the School's overall response to a welfare issue, including the use of individual pupil welfare plans (such as behaviour, healthcare and education plans, as appropriate). Regardless of the form used, the School's approach to promoting pupil welfare will be systematic and pupil focused.

### **Record Keeping**

All records created in accordance with this policy are managed in accordance with the School's policies that apply to the retention and destruction of records.

The information created in connection with this policy may contain personal data. The School's use of this personal data will be in accordance with data protection law. The School has published on its website privacy notices which explain how the School will use personal data.

### **Review and Evaluation**

The Learning Support Staff review this policy and provision as required and at least termly, drawing up developmental plans in order continually to increase the impact and effectiveness of this aspect of the School's educational and social role.

This policy is reviewed annually by the Board of Governors.

### **Version control**

Date of adoption of this policy	September 2025
Date of last review of this policy	Summer 2025
Date for next review of this policy	September 2026
Policy owner (SLT)	Deputy Head Academic

Policy owner ( <b>Board of Governors</b> )	Nominated Governor for SEND
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