

Access & Inclusion Policy at SOS- Hermann Gmeiner International College



Policy Terminology

Learning Difficulties

Challenges acquiring knowledge and skills in one or more subjects to the level expected of those of a similar age group that can be improved through educational interventions. Diagnoses that may fall under this umbrella term include but are not limited to Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Dysgraphia, Dyspraxia and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Learning Disability

Challenges in learning, understanding and communication that impact intellectual ability and cannot be improved through educational interventions. Diagnoses that fall under this umbrella term include but are not limited to Down's Syndrome and some forms of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Mental Health Issues/Challenges

An umbrella term used to describe specific mental health diagnoses including but not limited to Anxiety, Depression, Self-Harm, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Disordered Eating, Mood Disorders and Obsessive-Compulsive disorders (OCD). Some neurodevelopmental disorders such as Autism Spectrum Disorder may also fall under this category.

Psychosocial Support

Psychological interventions and strategies administered to individuals with mental health issues to improve their mental health.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) plan

Special education instructions, accommodations and support structures tailored to a student's mental health or learning difficulties, to enable them to succeed in an academic setting.

Accommodations

Modifications to typical ways of teaching and assessment to enable students who experience learning difficulties or mental health issues to make their academic experience as fair as possible.

Policy Statement

SOS-Hermann Gmeiner International College seeks to provide a school of academic excellence for students from SOS Children's villages from all over Africa, together with students from the host country, Ghana, in a spirit of Pan-Africanism and an awareness of the social needs of society. Two of the school's principal objectives are to present the highest possible standards of education to students showing potential for advanced academic education as well as prepare students for entrance into universities of high international standards. For students who successfully gain admission into the school, the college aims to provide all necessary psychosocial support and accommodations to ensure that they have an equitable and fair experience in the IB programmes regardless of any challenges that might create a barrier to their academic success.

Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of the Special Needs Policy is:

- To outline how the College seeks to support students with mental health issues and learning difficulties
- To classify and specify which mental health issues or learning challenges are covered by this policy
- To provide guidance to teachers, parents and students on their roles and responsibilities to ensure accommodated and effective learning interventions for students who require them
- To meet the expectations for equitable inclusion as per the Access and Inclusion Policy of the International Baccalaureate Organization.

Disabilities Not Covered by the Policy

SOS-HGIC does not currently have the facilities to accommodate all students with physical challenges. However, with the view of outlining the best possible support the school can provide the student, the Principal will meet with the parents/guardians of the student to discuss the challenges the student will face given the disability. The Student will be offered admission into the school if all parties involved agree that the students' needs can be met within the school. SOS-HGIC also does not currently have the facilities to accommodate students with intellectual or learning disabilities.

Support for Students with Mental Health Issues

Students with mental health issues or learning difficulties usually face challenges in being as academically successful as their peers due to issues beyond their control. These issues may present as behavior that is disruptive in class, symptoms that affect a student's ability to learn effectively, affect a student's motivation or self-esteem, or contribute to thoughts and behaviours that are harmful to themselves or to others. The Counselling Department has long been a part of the school, and supports students by providing psychosocial support through individual and group sessions based on students' needs, and by helping students understand and overcome their social, emotional or behavioral issues.

The Counselling Department is responsible for the following:

- Liaising with the MYP/DP Coordinators regularly to review and update students' learning plans for those who have personalized accommodations or considerations while at school. The Counselling Department develops strategies together with staff and parents/guardians to help students meet their full potential.
- Providing students experiencing mental health issues the necessary psychological support and needed to be successful in their academic careers. Depending on the nature and severity of the issue, psychological support will be provided either by the Counselling Department or by an external psychologist.
- In the case where mental health issues are seen to be making learning challenging for a student, a tracking system between the student's teacher, the Counselling Department, and the MYP/DP Coordinator will be initiated to closely monitor challenges and progress. Parents/guardians of the student will also be notified if there are safeguarding concerns or a need for further evaluation or assessment for the student. If there is a mental health diagnosis made as a result of an evaluation or assessment, that can be used to develop accommodations to support and help create a fair and equitable learning environment for the student.
- Students cannot receive in-class or examination accommodations without a formal diagnosis and report from a licensed mental health professional.

Learning Support for Students with Learning Difficulties

SOS-HGIC understands that learning difficulties can develop in students before adulthood due to circumstances beyond their control, and that some students will begin showing signs of a learning difficulty during adolescence. In such situations, the Counselling Department, in consultation with parents, will make a referral to an outside agency for assessments. The School Counselor and MYP/DP Coordinator will advise the parents accordingly depending on the outcome of the assessment.

Also, in alignment with the International Baccalaureate (IB) requirements, the Counselling Department aims to:

- Identify students who may be having difficulties in one or more subjects. Students can be identified either through the tracking system, staff referrals or by a student who himself/herself self-refers to the School Counselor(s).
- Provide students experiencing learning difficulties the support needed to improve in the classroom (See Appendix). Students will be given the opportunity to access learning support structures in place such as academic support lessons. Heads of Departments (HODs) are responsible for arranging academic support for students who may need support and through an Individualized Educational Program (IEP) plan.
- Ensure students receive accommodations for internal and IB examinations under conditions that are as fair as possible.
- Assist in arranging for training to staff on differentiation in the classroom that includes awareness of the learning difficulties of some students so that teaching and learning strategies can provide for the needs of such students
- Liaise with parents regarding the support needs of their wards
- Conduct classroom observations at the request of a teacher or parent.

Responsibility and Accountability for Support

- Once a student is offered admission into SOS-HGIC, it becomes the school's responsibility to meet the known needs of that student. Within the limitations of our current provisions and facilities, the College will assist students with identified learning and mental health needs.
- It is the responsibility of the MYP/DP Coordinators and Heads of Departments to monitor and report to the Vice Principal and the Counselling Department the development of students with learning difficulties and mental health issues, and to monitor the students' progress from time to time. It is also the responsibility of the Coordinators to submit applications for inclusive access arrangements to the International Baccalaureate (IB) for DP2 students undertaking final IB examinations and for MYP5 students undertaking the eAssessment.
- Each department will be responsible for helping the student meet their academic support goals, and alerting the Counselling department of any learning or behavioural issues they observe in their students.
- It is also the responsibility of parents and guardians to inform the school of their student's learning challenges upon admission to SOS-HGIC, and to alert the school to any challenges that arise that may affect their learning or their mental or physical health.

Identification and Review of Student Needs

Parents/guardians are encouraged to be truthful about their ward's mental health issues and learning difficulties, and provide all relevant medical and specialist reports they have in their possession upon admission and if the need arises over the course of their stay at the College.

- Once a student has been identified as having a special need in a particular subject, the teacher will take steps to provide differentiated learning opportunities that will aid the student's academic progression. Each department has its own ways of providing support in their respective subjects.
- The Counselling Department will be consulted for support and advice and to observe the student in class if needed.
- Through the above actions, it will then be determined which level of provision the student would need. If it is observed that the student is having challenges due to a learning disability that can be managed in school, then the drafting of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) plan will be initiated by the Counselling Department.
- Once a student has been identified as having a mental health issue, the School Counselor(s) will be consulted and specialist reports will be referred to to determine the level of support the student will need.
- Parents/guardians will be informed of their ward's recommendations per their IEP, and of progress made in their learning as a result of the interventions made.
- The learning plan will be reviewed on a semester basis.

In Service Training

The school takes responsibility for providing adequate training to staff in identifying and assisting students with mental health issues and learning difficulties.

Working in Partnership with Families

- The school will create multiple opportunities to be in contact with parents/guardians throughout their ward's education regarding their wellbeing and academic performance.
- The school will keep parents informed about the content of their ward's learning plan and accommodations and any necessary changes that may be made during the academic year.
- The school will arrange meetings with parents/guardians to discuss the progress of their ward when necessary.
- The school will keep parents informed if there are safeguarding concerns or a need for further evaluation or assessment for their ward. The school will keep parents informed if accommodations will need to be arranged as a result of a mental health diagnosis.

References

International Baccalaureate (2022) *Access and inclusion policy*. Retrieved from <https://www.ibo.org/globalassets/new-structure/programmes/dp/pdfs/access-and-inclusion-policy-en.pdf>.

Appendix

Support Provided by all Departments in SOS-HGIC

- A student's challenge is reported either by alerting Heads of Department during Departmental meetings or by speaking with a member of the Counselling Department.
- Students are identified by teachers and the MYP/DP Coordinator based on low academic performance, and disruptive or concerning behaviour observed by staff members.
- Support lessons are organized by individual teachers (on a case by case basis) outside of class.
- Teachers adopt differentiated teaching and learning strategies (in and out of the classroom) to help both higher achieving students as well as weaker ones.
- There is collaborative support across departments with the support of the MYP/DP Coordinators depending on the student's particular challenge.
- A school-wide tracking system is available via tracking form to monitor student progress.
- Accommodations can be applied to learning and teaching, formative and summative assessments, tests and internal and external examination.
- Accommodations include but are not limited to extra time on written assessments, extra time on listening assessments, extensions to submission deadlines, extensions to homework deadlines, and specific seating arrangements in class and examination settings.