

# Deledda International School Special Education Needs Policy

## AIMS

The aim of this document is to establish **common procedures** and practices within the school community to help foster a more inclusive learning environment for all students at DIS, helping them to overcome their permanent or temporary difficulties and empowering them with the necessary tools to pursue their academic and personal goals. In particular, it aims at addressing the specific needs of those students with learning disabilities (dyslexia, dysorthographia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia) or with particular medical and or mental conditions that might affect the way they operate within an academic environment.

**Actors** in this policy are of course all teachers of the school, including the principal and the coordinators, the school counselor, and those students and their families for which a specific diagnosis has been produced or is to be produced by a recognized practitioner.

With this policy the school chooses to build on the “Legge 170/2010”, which is taken as a basepoint although it would not be necessary to consider it given that we are not part of the state school systems. It delineates the consequent actions to be taken, keeping in mind the IBO principles of inclusions as clearly outlined in the document “Learning Diversity in the International Baccalaureate Programme: Special Education Needs within the IBO”.

## INCLUSION AND SUPPORT PRINCIPLES

- All students enrolled at DIS should be put in a condition to have **access to the best possible learning** environment possible
- Students with Special Education Needs (SEN) must progressively more aware of their **strengths** and **difficulties**, and take more and more **responsibility** for their own education as they advance their studies in the school.
- Teachers and parents should act as a **support system** that aims at the student autonomy, building on self-esteem and empowerment rather than acting as “substitutes” and mere care-takers.
- Teachers and parents are **directly responsible** for their own learning about these matters, and strive to become aware of students special needs and how to address them.
- The school is actively involved in **supporting professional development**, promoting informative seminars for the community, and also **organize courses and activities** that might benefit not only SEN individuals but everybody else too, provided the budgetary constraints of the foundation.
- All actors must share their responsibilities and define their roles in the action through the preparation of a common document, the **Personalized Didactic Plan (PDP)**.
- The PDP must contain enough information to allow teachers and students operate within and outside the classroom, with the goal of preparing the students reach the specific school objectives, including exam requirements (Terza Media, MYP5 e-assessment, Diploma exams).
- The PDP should not be limited to a list of “concessions” or “exclusions” for the student, but rather constitute a **true operative document** that allows a successful didactic action. For this reason it has to be widely discussed and shared among all stakeholders.

- **Students are ultimately responsible** for monitoring their own process of learning, through the use of the ATL journal where reflections on own learning become particularly important. Teachers and parents should only have a support role in guiding pupils through this process.

## THE STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL PDP

\*) Whenever a potential special need is identified in a student that has no prior documentation of any learning difficulty, the **family must be contacted** by the coordinator or by the school counselor and the possibility of undergoing a diagnosis should be considered. In particular, given the special “bilingual” nature of the middle school (but also High school, considering that most kids study in a language that is not their mother tongue), an expert or group of experts that are **aware of the peculiarities of the school** should be ideally preferred. It is then crucial that the family communicates to the practitioner all possible details about the school, including teachers observations and possibly already a counselor evaluation.

\*) The diagnosis is then carefully reviewed by the counselor and the teachers council with the aim of **translating it into an operative set of good practices**. This is when a first version of the PDP is produced, by the end of November if the diagnosis arrives at the beginning of the year, and in any case within a month from the diagnosis if it is the first one. If the documentation arrives after the November deadline, the school might refuse to take into consideration until the next year.

\*) The preparation of the PDP must take into account:

- the content of the **diagnosis**
- **teachers observations** and any educational evidence produced by the school
- specific requirements for the **preparation to the relevant exit exams** of the cycle, as explained in details in the next paragraph.

\*) If a PDP has already been produced for a student, at the beginning of the new year and by November 30<sup>th</sup>, the school will revise it and produce an updated version. A new diagnosis might be necessary, according to the judgment of the school counselor, and in any case no diagnosis older than 3 years will be taken into consideration. The updated version of the PDP must be signed again by all actors.

## THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM AND EXAM REQUIREMENTS

The curriculum at DIS can be thought of in three phases, or cycles. In each cycle, different actions might be necessary, according to the final objectives, especially in terms of external exams requirements. The PDP will be modified and adjusted so to make the student more autonomous in the use of special tools, less dependent on some that might not be allowed during exams, and more aware of how to use his strengths and overcome difficulties.

1) For the preparation to the **Terza Media** exam, which involves students in MYP1, MYP2 and MYP3, the PDP might align to those prepared in Italian schools, provided the MYP allows for it. For instance, mind maps might be used by students during tests, partial or total substitution of a written task with an oral one can be allowed, modification of some assignment can be discussed. In general, any practice that the Italian legislation allows (refer mostly to L.170/2010) can be included in the PDP, with the approval of the **terza media coordinator** who will carefully review it and assess it against the particular policies of those schools where our students take the exam.

2) In years **4 and 5 of the MYP**, a gradual shift towards the IBO requirements must be made. The main aim of the first two years of High School should be to get the students equipped with all the tools necessary to be autonomous learners in the Diploma Programme, helping them choose the right path within the DP subject choice. This **transition** is particularly delicate and the PDP should reflect it. Referring to the document “Candidates with Assessment Access Requirements”, PDPs must ensure that students take progressively **more responsibility** in the use of certain measures, learn how to use computers with spell checkers, school-required graphic calculators, and so on. Substitution of written task with oral ones must be generally avoided, and a close monitoring of the student’s involvement is required by all teachers.

3) In the last two years of High School students prepare for a challenging set of exams that have rigorous, mostly external assessment that is based on several written papers and tasks and very few oral examination: **the Diploma exams**. Students with special needs, especially those who belong to the spectrum of dyslexia, must be advised to **choose carefully their six subjects**, their topic for the Extended Essay and all other “internal assessment” requirements. Ideally, at the beginning of year 1 of the DP a new diagnosis is produced, indicating clearly the quantitative results achieved by the students in each component of the assessment(s), so that PDP can reflect more closely what the actual assessment requirements of the students are in terms of the aforementioned document “Candidates with Assessment Access Requirements”. Both at the beginning of year 1 and year 2 of the Diploma, families and students with SEN meet the DP coordinator and/or the class coordinator to discuss what to do, in view of exam registration. Especially during summative evaluations, teachers will make sure that students will be tested under **exam-like conditions**, allowing them nothing more and nothing less than what the PDP says. Clearly, teachers and students will continue to collaborate closely to make the learning experience effective and enjoyable, but the school cannot forget that preparation to the final exam is one of the main objective of the didactic action. In particular, see the Appendix for a list of specific access requirements that are not or may not be allowed during DP exams.

#### THE ROLE OF EACH ACTOR

**Teachers** should follow a precise path of professional development, approved every year by the principal and funded by the school. Ideally, at least one teacher is trained with an IBO official course about Special Education. All teachers must attend a series of meetings throughout the year where local experts come speak about learning disabilities, availability of special tools and software to help students, and differentiation in the classroom. They also share their best practices with each other during the weekly meetings with the coordinators.

Each teacher has to be aware of the students with special needs in his classes, sign their PDP and update the online version of the PDP with reflections and observations.

**Students** should be encouraged to undergo a process of self-awareness, self-acceptance and self-empowerment. They will be guided by the school to a gradual process of independence in the use of tools, technology and aid in general to help foster their preparation and overcome their difficulties. They are to sign the PDP as well, choose a teacher to act as their main tutor/mentor for the process. They should be also encouraged to talk about their issue with their peers, their family and the school counselor. In their ATL journal, they will note down all progress made and their reflections. When advised to use a particular tool such as a calculator, a spell checker, a text editor etc., they should make every effort to try to use them under the guidance of their teachers and family. If the student refuses to use one or more of such tools, or does not want to follow some of the suggestions written in the PDP,

the matter should be discussed with the counselor and the family. A new PDP might be required to adapt to the new situation.

**Parents** should offer their support to their child in terms of awareness, acceptance and also practical help. They sign the PDP after discussing with the counselor and possibly the class coordinator or the student's tutor. They should also discuss with the school all possible extra measures to take in order to help their child. Purchase of software, choice of home tutors, direct help and other systems must be carefully decided and shared with the school, to make sure the action is aligned with the school's principles. Their aim should be that of making students more independent by the time they reach the Diploma Programme years.

The school's **counselor** has the role of editing the PDP, facilitating the communication between the different parts. He should share expertise on the theme of learning disabilities, propose a professional development strategy, and ultimately offer psychological support to the community.

#### LIST OF POSSIBLE EXEMPTIONS, TECH TOOLS AND COMPENSATION MEASURES THAT THE SCHOOL ALLOWS

ITEM	MYP12 3	MYP45	DP12
Use of calculator	YES	YES	YES
Use of multiplication tables, basic operation tables	YES	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>
Use of self-produced lists of formulae	YES	T.A.	<b>NO</b>
Use of mind maps	YES	T.A.	<b>NO</b>
Use of self-produced material and notes during tests	YES	T.A.	<b>NO</b>
Use of computer for word editing	YES	YES	YES
Use of spell checker	YES	YES	YES
Use of vocal synthesizer	YES	YES	?
Use of speech recognition software	YES	YES	?
Extra time during tests (usually 25% but more can be discussed)	YES	YES	YES
Reduction in the number of exercises/expectations	YES	T.A.	T.A.
Partial or total substitution of written assignments with orals	YES	T.A.	<b>NO</b>
Modified use of criteria in assessment – different weighting	YES	T.A.	<b>NO</b>
Modified use of criteria in assessment – substitution of criteria	YES	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>
Possibility to take tests at a different time	YES	YES	T.A.
Possibility to take tests in a different location	YES	YES	YES
Rescheduling of tests/summative tasks according to needs	YES	T.A.	<b>NO</b>
Morning scheduling of tests/tasks	YES	T.A.	<b>NO</b>
Reduction in homework load	YES	T.A.	T.A.

T.A. = requires Teacher's Approval

It is implied that some of these items are limited by the physical and budgetary constraints of the school itself. Different actors will then be in charge of providing some of these resources, and this must be then clearly stated in the PDP.

Items from this list, like every other part of this policy, might be amended, added or modified with the approval of the “Collegio Docenti”.