



**Special Education Policy  
Saplings Nature School  
August 2022**

***Rationale***

Admissions to Saplings is not diagnostic in nature and therefore, it is possible that a student with exceptionalities (special rights) might be admitted to our school. If a student is identified after being admitted, the school-based team, which might include administration, educational assistance, and the teacher(s), will strive to provide assistance to the student while taking into consideration the school's resource limitations.

***Policy***

Diverse education is an integral part of Saplings' education program, not a separate component. In keeping with this philosophy, we believe that every student has the fundamental right to an education in the most appropriate setting for their needs. Classroom spaces will be provided for students with diverse needs that are conducive to interaction with age-appropriate peers.

Saplings believes that all students have unique educational needs and that each person can play an essential role in our school community. Saplings is committed to empowering students to reach their potential as unique learners. Through purposeful inclusion we encourage students to develop their gifts, become self-advocates, and gain independence as valued members of their communities.

The education of students with diverse needs, as for all students, is a shared commitment. The Ministry of Education, Saplings, parents, and community agencies each have prime responsibility for some areas of the students' development while sharing responsibility for other areas. Maximum benefit to students occurs where the efforts and expectations of those involved with them complement each other.

***Admission***

Every effort will be made to accommodate students in our school. There may be situations for which we are not equipped, experienced, or qualified to the degree necessary to admit every student who applies.

Because we are a small school and intend to remain small as a part of our learning program design, we may not have the economy of scale required to implement staffing, equipment, or programming needed to support all students adequately, even when eligible for supplemental funding from the Ministry of Education. Only in such cases would we ever deny a student enrollment.

***Admissions Procedure***

- a) Admission of students with exceptionalities is subject to Saplings Nature School admissions policy.
- b) In order to be considered for admission to the following school year, all relevant documentation must be received no later than March 28. Applications received after that date will receive a lower priority. Mid-year transfers will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.
- c) Parents must complete the registration package.
- d) The application process will not proceed until all required testing/documentation is received by the school.
- e) After the interview, a recommendation is made by the teacher/evaluator to the Head of School.
- f) Current program, which includes students and Education Assistants (EA's), is taken into consideration when a new family applies.

g) Saplings Nature School reserves the right not to enroll or re-enroll students whose learning, behavioural, or social needs are best met by placement in a specialized setting (i.e.: program/support as are found in a typical school district's Resource Rooms), or a specialized education program.

### ***Instruction Format***

As consistent with our school's philosophy and approach to education for all of its students, students with special needs are encouraged to be as independent as possible. Parental input is strongly encouraged in planning a program. Final decisions regarding levels of integration, staffing and the student's educational program rests with Saplings Nature School administration. The school will meet the needs of each student by employing Educational Assistants where necessary and consulting specialists where possible. Educational Assistants with classroom teachers to determine the level of extra support a student needs, and support will be provided within the classroom when possible, on an individual or small group basis.

Part of the overall budget for the school will be set aside for Special Education training of staff. Relevant in-service will be provided to all teaching and support staff in the school prior to the placement in programs for diverse students or prior to and during the integration of individual students. When possible, all staff will receive the same specialized training geared toward working with the diversity of our specific students. For example, professional development days or release time will include (but is not limited to) components of Autism training, trauma-informed practices, and the like, depending on the needs of the students. In addition to this, staff may also participate in additional training or certification processes which build up specific skills, and which designate that staff member as a "local expert" who will be tasked with sharing information with all staff members.

Educational assistants will be assigned in consultation with the Head of School, teacher(s), and/or Program Director. Other support staff, such as speech/language pathologists, psychologists, counsellors, and diverse education assistants will be provided within available resources. Financial arrangements for providing ongoing speech, physio and occupational therapy and Educational Assistance are the responsibility of the parents.

### ***Teachers' Responsibility***

Staff are responsible for the students' educational program, and will communicate regularly with one another and parents to determine best practices for each student, including those students with special needs. Staff are also responsible for reporting to parents regarding a student's progress. The school does not make a distinction between a teacher and a learning assistance teacher in the classroom setting. When possible, all teachers are expected to offer the kinds of learning assistance that each student needs.

### ***Head of School's Responsibility***

The Head of School is responsible for supporting the program according to the Individual Education Plan (IEP), and for maintaining the vision for inclusion in the school. They process new admissions, sign contracts with outside services where appropriate, and provide the same services as for all students (e.g. budgeting, staffing, staff supervision, facilities, safety, dealing with major concerns, appropriate curriculum, etc.)

The Head of School will ensure that:

- All basic safety procedures, as directed by student needs, will be clearly outlined and provided prior to placement for each integrated student;
- School facilities will be updated, where possible, to meet current specifications in order to ensure safe access to all building exits;
- Both students with diverse needs, and their classmates will be prepared prior to the integration process;
- Support staff, teachers, administrators, Head of School and/or the Program Director has met to determine strategies for the attainment of integration goals and designate areas of responsibility for each goal;
- Prior to placement, basic equipment and facilities will be adapted to the needs of students with diverse needs (where possible) in the regular classroom and throughout the school.

### ***Individual Education Plan (IEP's)***

An Individual Education Plan (IEP) is a documented plan developed for a student with special needs that describes individualized goals, adaptations, modifications, the services to be provided, and includes measures for tracking achievement. An IEP must have one or more of the following:

- the goals or outcomes set for that student for that school year where they are different from the learning outcomes set out in an applicable educational program guide; or
- a list of the support services required to achieve goals established for the student; or
- a list of the adaptations to educational materials, instructional strategies or assessment methods.

Each student reported on form 1701 with special needs will have an IEP on file unless:

- the student with special needs requires little or no adaptations to materials, instruction or assessment methods; or
- the expected learning outcomes have not been modified; or
- the student requires 25 or fewer hours of remedial instruction by someone other than the classroom teacher, in a school year.

The IEP outlines the educational plan for the student to enable them to function in a regular class. It outlines the program modifications and/or adaptations for the student and the services that are to be provided. An IEP should also include the following:

- student name and grade;
- the present levels of educational performance of the student;
- strengths and challenges/areas of growth
- the setting where the educational program is to be provided;
- the names of all personnel who will be providing the educational program and the support services for the student during the school year;
- the period of time and process for review of the IEP;
- evidence of evaluation or review, which could include revisions made to the plan and the tracking of achievement in relation to goals; and plans for the next transition point in the student's education (including transitions beyond school completion)

It is formed and implemented by a team, which may consist of any of the following people:

- Teachers
- The student's parents/guardians
- Teacher's assistant
- The student
- Head of School
- Program Director

When Saplings is required to provide an IEP for a student, we will:

- ensure that the IEP is reviewed at least once each school year following the year the IEP is developed and, where necessary, it is revised or canceled, and
- will offer a parent of the student, and where appropriate, the student the opportunity to be consulted about the preparation of an IEP.

## ***Creating the IEP***

### *Fall*

1. Meet with new assistants and teachers to discuss each Special Needs Student.
2. Coordinate the involvement of therapists and consultants (where appropriate)
3. Provide support for classroom teachers as the students with Special Needs settle into their new class.
4. Observe students with Special Needs in class
5. Hold IEP meetings to establish or to update IEPs
6. Administer or arrange for the administration of relevant assessments
7. Begin direct instruction for students

### *Winter*

1. Assess and evaluate each students' program
2. Problem-solve with teaching team as needed
3. Receive and process new applications
4. Continue direct instruction
5. Evaluate program

### *Spring*

1. Hold team meetings for year-end reporting
2. Work on IEP for following year
3. Apply for Special Education grants for the following school year
4. Participate in determining the student's placement and assistant placement for the coming year

## ***Integration***

Integration means providing the most appropriate education for each student in the least restrictive setting. The process of integration follows a continuum that varies from full-time placement in a regular class to full-time placement in a separate facility. This may take different forms, such as physical, functional, social, academic, and/or societal integration. To the maximum extent appropriate, students with diverse needs are to be educated with age-appropriate peers. Placement of students in separate programs is to occur only when their needs cannot be met in integrated environments, even with the provision of adequate supplementary support.

Integration is a long-term process. The implementation will be achieved over time as funds for facilities, personnel, and resources are available. The process of integration will be facilitated with the support of, and full consultation with, school administrators, teachers, staff, and the Head of School.

If support services are necessary and financially viable for our school, such as additional education assistants, computer equipment, transportation, and materials, they will be identified and in place prior to the integration of students into a classroom. The integration process will be monitored by the administrative, teaching and staff team in conjunction with the Head of School, and adjusted with respect to impact on the integrated student, as well as the effect on the teaching and learning situation in the classroom.

## **Parental Concerns**

Parents have the right to be consulted in both the placement and program plans for their student. When parents have a concern relating to the educational needs of their student, they are to involve those listed in sequential order:

- The classroom teacher and/or staff member;
- The Head of School;
- The Program Director.

If the avenues suggested above have been explored and no resolution has been reached, the parents may invoke the

Appeal process.

### **Ministry**

- a) The Ministry of Education provides a supplemental special education funding grant for students with specific learning, social/emotional, or physical needs. Diagnoses alone is not sufficient for the designation to receive the special education grant; the school must also provide documentation to indicate the programming and supports in place for the student. The Ministry of Education requires that assessment documentation for students receiving special education grants must be current; no more than five years out of date.
- b) The total Special Education grant monies received by the school provide funding to support the programs of all the students with special needs in the school system.
- c) The Ministry of Education provides supplemental Special Education Funding for students designated in Categories A-H. Students must be eligible, as a student in BC, to receive the basic student grant in order to be eligible for special education funding from the Ministry of Education.
- d) There is no supplemental funding for students designated in Categories K, P, Q and R. The funding for support services for students in these categories is designated by the Ministry of Education as being included in the basic student grant.