Policy name	VIRGINIA COLLEGE POLICY REGARDING THE USE OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY IN ADDITIONAL EDUCATION
School name	Virginia College
Date of ratification of policy by the board of management	4th November 2024
Date of scheduled review of policy by board of management	
Engagement with student council	October 2024
Engagement with parents (association)	October 2024
Engagement with staff	26-9-2024 to 6-10-2024

Mission Statement: Tús Feasa Fiafraí
Faithful to our motto, Virginia College is committed to providing quality teaching in a safe and positive learning environment. Whilst fostering academic and personal achievement, we aim to nurture an educational community of informed, responsible and caring citizens for an ever-changing world.

Contents

Purpose of Policy

- To outline the framework for the provision and use of assistive technology (AT) to support students with additional educational needs.
- To ensure inclusion, access, and participation in the learning process for all students.

Scope of Policy

- This policy applies to all students, staff, and parents/guardians of Virginia College.
- It covers the processes for identifying, acquiring, and implementing AT resources and strategies to support students' educational needs.

Definition of Assistive Technology

Assistive Technology refers to any device, software, or equipment that helps students with additional educational needs to enhance their learning capabilities and achieve educational outcomes.

Roles and Responsiblities

- *School Leadership:* Provide overall support, ensure resources are available, and uphold the policy's implementation.
- *AEN Co-ordinators*: Oversee the identification and assessment of students requiring AT, manage applications for AT, and co-ordinate training.
- *Teachers*: Integrate AT into teaching practices and collaborate with the AEN team.
- *Parents/Guardians*: Participate in planning and provide support in the use of AT at home.
- *Students*: Engage with AT resources provided to support their learning.

Application process for assistive technology

In general assistive technology is applied for to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) based on a recommendation for a student provided in a psychologists and/or occuptional therapists report.

Eligibility Criteria

The eligibility criteria for the application process for an assistive technology grant are outlined in [Circular No 0010/2013](#)

Application Submission for Assistive Technology Grant

1. The school fills in an application form for Assistive Technology Grant (https://ncse.ie/assistive-technology) on behalf of the student. Parents/guardians are the requested to sign the form before it is sent to the Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) for the area (https://ncse.ie/special-educational-needs-organiser-seno).
2. The grant application is then processed by the SENO and if the grant is sanctioned it is forwarded to the Department of Education for funding approval.
3. The Department of Education forwards the sanction for funding to the school.
4. The school then orders the device.
   Steps 1 – 4 can take a considerable amount of time up to 12 weeks or more.
5. The device is sent to IT department for an image to be placed on it (this is a security measure and ensure all virus protection is updated). Students must not tamper with this, or any other, software installed by CMETB.
6. Parents/Guardians are notified that the device is in school and are requested to fill in the IT Student Loan Device Agreement (Appendix A).
7. When this Loan Agreement form is returned signed by Parent/Guardian the student is issued the device.

Planning and Implementation of Assistive Technology

Training and Support
Coding Class

The objective of JC Coding classes is to equip students with the necessary digital skills to enhance their learning experience and make effective use of assistive technology.

- Students learn to organise their digital work by creating dedicated folders for each subject, enhancing organisational skills
- Training in using Microsoft Word for creating documents, formatting text, and inserting images

- Introduction to Microsoft PowerPoint for creating presentations, including slide design, animations, and transitions.

IT Support Classes

Students receive targeted training in the following Office 365 tools, each chosen to support various learning needs and styles:

Immersive Reader:

Purpose: Enhance reading comprehension and accessibility for students with dyslexia, visual impairments, or other reading challenges.

Features:

Adjusts text size, spacing, and background color for optimal readability.

Highlights text while reading aloud to support decoding and fluency.

Offers translation features for multilingual students, allowing them to read in their first language and switch back to English.

Grammar tools to break down complex sentences, highlighting parts of speech.

Applications: Used in Word, OneNote, and Teams to support reading across subjects.

Dictate:

Purpose: Assist students who struggle with writing by enabling voice-to-text functionality, thus supporting those with motor difficulties or dysgraphia.

Features:

Converts spoken words into text in real-time across Office apps like Word, Outlook, and OneNote.

Supports multilingual dictation, allowing students to dictate in their preferred language.

Voice commands for punctuation and formatting, making it easier for students to create well-structured documents.

Applications: Used in assignments, note-taking, and email communication, promoting written expression and participation.

PowerPoint Coach:

Purpose: Improve public speaking skills by providing real-time feedback on presentation delivery.

Features:

Analyzes pace, pitch, and use of filler words, offering constructive suggestions.

Tracks repetitive language and inclusive language use, encouraging clear and respectful communication.

Provides practice reports to help students track their progress over time.

Applications: Integrated into presentation practice sessions, supporting students preparing for oral exams, class presentations, or leadership roles in school activities.

Microsoft Editor:

Purpose: Assist with writing clarity, grammar, and style across multiple languages, supporting students who struggle with written expression.

Features:

Provides suggestions for grammar, spelling, and style improvements in Word and Outlook.

Offers explanations for suggested changes, helping students learn and improve their writing skills.

Available in multiple languages, supporting multilingual students.

Applications: Used in drafting essays, creating reports, and communicating effectively in emails.

OneNote:

Purpose: Facilitate organized note-taking and collaboration, supporting students with organizational and executive function challenges.

Features:

Digital notebooks for organizing class notes, assignments, and multimedia resources.

Allows embedding of audio recordings, videos, and files, catering to different learning styles.

Collaboration features for group projects and peer feedback.

Applications: Used as a digital binder across subjects, integrating class notes, homework, and resources in one accessible place.

Microsoft Forms:

Purpose: Provide a platform for formative assessment and feedback, supporting differentiated instruction.

Features:

Customizable quizzes and surveys for student self-assessment and teacher feedback.

Provides real-time data on student understanding, allowing for timely interventions.

Supports accessibility features like Immersive Reader for quizzes.

Applications: Used for creating self-assessment quizzes, gathering feedback, and checking understanding during lessons.

Individualised Support

Provide one-on-one or small group training sessions for students identified as needing specific assistive technology tools.

Tailor training to the individual's needs, ensuring students understand how to use the technology to support their learning effectively.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Regular check-ins with students to address any difficulties they may be experiencing with the use of technology.

Continuous access to resources and tutorials.

Training for Staff

Staff Training

Regular professional development sessions for teachers on the use of assistive technology tools and how to integrate them into their teaching practices.

Workshops/Demonstrations on how to Office 365 accessibility features to support differentiated instruction and student engagement.

Infographics on using accessibility tools available in the staffroom.

Teachers are notified by the AEN Department of all students using assistive technology so they can determine, in conjunction with the student, Special Needs Assistant (where applicable) and the AEN Department, how the technology can be used within their subject.

Implementation and Integration

In the classoom:

Incorporate these tools into daily lessons, providing students with opportunities to practice using them in a variety of contexts.

Teachers receive training on how to integrate these tools into lesson plans to support differentiation and personalised learning.

Use of Assistive Technology in State Examinations

Students who are allocated assistive technology **may** be entitled to use all or part of the equipment to complete their State Examinations. The relevant application to be allowed to do so will be made to the State Exams Commission by the AEN Department.

Guidelines for use of Assistive Technology

- The student who is allocated the assistive technology gets priority use of the equipment. However, when that student is not using the technology, it is at the discretion of the AEN Department to use it for the benefit of other students.

- Careful storage of all technology is required for safe keeping and due care must be shown to prevent unnecessary damage to devices, e.g. laptop must be stored in a protective case and put into student's locker when not being used and moving between classes.

- The student should make every effort to avoid causing any unintended damage to the assistive technology. No food or drink should be consumed when using the equipment. Similarly, the identifying labels/barcodes for each piece of technology must not be removed.

- Students are encouraged to charge their laptops at home so that they have a full battery during the school day

Appendix A

Agreement for the use of Virginia College School IT Device

The ICT device listed below has been issued to the named Student: _____

Make/Model of Device:		Serial Number of Device:	
Stock Book Number & Year			
Issued to (Name of Student):		Date issued:	
Device Returned:	Date:	Received by:	

- I understand that at all times the device remains the property of Virginia College and CMETB.
- I understand that the device is for my use only and is not to be shared with other individuals.
- **I understand that I am responsible for this device and that it must be kept safe and secure.**
- I understand that the device is only to be used for activities related to school.
- I understand that the device is to be used responsibly and it must not be used to bully, harass or intimidate others or to carry out illegal activities.
- I understand that I am responsible for:
  - **Protecting the ICT equipment from loss or damage;**
  - Ensuring that device software and virus protection is kept up to date;
  - Ensuring the ICT equipment is not used in an unreasonable or illegal manner, such as:
    - Improper servicing of the equipment;
    - Improper installation of ancillary hardware upgrades;
    - Installation of any software not relevant to educational purposes;
    - Reporting any problems with the equipment (i.e. loss / theft / damage / device malfunction) during the loan period within 48 hours the school Principal;
  - Saving my own data and creating my own backups whilst using the equipment and in advance of returning. On return of ICT equipment, any and all data will be erased and be no longer available.
- I understand that any misuse of this device may result in sanctions under the school Code of Behaviour and the withdrawal of permission to use the device.
- I understand that Virginia College will not be responsible for any access to the internet and social media occurring outside the confines of the school.

- I agree to return the device to Virginia College on request/instruction of the Principal or other authorised staff member.
- I agree to delete all personal data from the device before it is returned to Virginia College

I _____ **hereby agree to the above terms and conditions when borrowing ICT equipment from Virginia College. I certify that I have read and accept my responsibilities when borrowing this ICT equipment. I assume responsibility for all use of this equipment and all risk of loss or damage.** The borrower agrees to take reasonable care of the device provided under this agreement. If the device is damaged beyond normal wear and tear, the borrower is responsible for the full cost of repair or replacement of the device. The borrower must notify the school within five working days of any damage.

Signed: **Date of issue:**

_____   _____

On behalf of Virginia College

_____   _____

Student   **Parent of Student under 18 years**

Address of student:

_____