

A.S.D Policy

Rationale:

These classes aim to offer an Autism specific learning environment within a mainstream primary school. This type of educational setting facilitates optimum inclusion for primary school pupils as part of the school community with access to mainstream activities as appropriate. It is expected that all pupils accepted in the ASD classes will be able to avail of a minimum level of integrated education.

The classrooms are physically structured in accordance with the TEACCH Model, with specific areas for individual learning, group work, play and lunch.

Physical Environment:

In addition to the classroom for ASD pupils, the ASD wing has the following rooms:

The Sensory Integration Room consists of a variety of equipment to develop fine and gross motor skills, aid sensory processing and provide exercises for both stimulation and preparation for learning.

The multi-sensory room consists of fibre-optic lights, bubble tube, projector, mirrors, a ball pool, a variety of textiles and mood music. This room can be used to stimulate a child or help a child self-regulate.

A Central Activity Space: This room is used for daily sensory and motor development exercise circuits with a variety of activities for alerting, organising and calming pupils as needed.

Sensory Swing: This has many therapeutic benefits. Swinging has the potential to impact the brains' ability to process sensory information which assists in the early stages of development.

In each ASD class there is a Small Safe Space which is a quiet room for the children.

Kitchen: The children are given opportunities to work on sensory challenges, partake in fine and gross motor skills activities, following directions and work on their food aversions.

Storage Room: This room is used to store materials, equipment, board games and art supplies.

Positive language:

We use the term 'ASD class' or 'New Wing' to describe the classes. We do not use the term 'autism unit' (although this term may be used in some Department and Skills and National Council for Special Education correspondence.) We use the term 'an autistic person' as generally people in the autistic community prefer to be identity first. However, we take the individual preferences into account on how the person would like to be referred to.

Enrolment:

Pre-enrolment (see also the school's general enrolment policy)

Parents and guardians of children with a medical diagnosis* specifying Autism may choose to pre-enrol their child on our Special Classes for Children with Autism.

(*Assessment and classification of autism or autistic spectrum disorder by a psychiatrist or clinical psychologist using DSM-IV, DSM-V, or ICD-10 criteria or multi-disciplinary assessment of same by a professional team [including a clinical psychologist])

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(** Reports on the child **MUST** include a recommendation for special class placement because his/her initial needs are unlikely to be met in a whole time mainstream classroom environment.

Places in the special classes are allocated on the following basis;

- ◆ Teaching staff in St. Patrick's BNS will observe applicants in pre-school and/or other settings and recommend a special class setting.
- ◆ The pupil has a report which includes a recommendation for special class placement.
- ◆ Priority is given to pupils enrolled in the school.
- ◆ Other places are allocated according to our admissions policy and admissions note.

In order to facilitate the efficient day-to-day running of the school, the principal is authorised by the Board of Management to make decisions in accordance with the policy.

Role of the school at pre-enrolment stage

The Principal or Deputy Principal will meet with parents to discuss their child's strengths and needs.

Parents will be informed about this school, including the various workings of the mainstream and special classes. Parents will also be informed of possible alternatives, such as special schools.

Existing school, psychological, medical, speech/language, occupational therapy and other reports will be considered. Staff may arrange to observe the child in his/her pre-school or some other setting. The Principal may also (with parent's permission) consult with the professionals who prepared reports on the child and the professionals with whom the school has an existing relationship (such as our National Educational Psychological Service psychologist) before making a recommendation to parents regarding the perceived suitability, or otherwise, of enrolling the child in a special class.

Where parents choose to proceed with the special class option and where a place has been offered, the principal shall contact the SENO and inform them that the parents have accepted a placement in our school and all relevant paperwork will be completed.

Inclusion:

It is expected that the children entering our special classes would not require this provision for the duration of their primary school education. Inclusion with typically developing peers in inclusive mainstream classroom environments, in so far as possible, is the Board's aim.

The nature of all inclusion shall be determined by the teaching staff, following reviews at appropriate intervals and consultation with the child's parents.

Increasing (and full) inclusion will be put in place for children who are successful in the integrated setting. (There would be an expectation that the child is capable of meaningful learning and functioning within the setting)

Partial integration will take the form of contact during situations or curriculum areas, where particular skills and interests and/or learning can be advanced: e.g. structured social play groups, music lessons, drama, school trips, maths lessons, social personal and health education (SPHE) lessons, visual arts, school assemblies, class or school celebrations, etc.

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The minimum level of contact for all pupils (limited integration) will include: some lunchtimes, some group activities and some playground breaks. It may not be possible to support even limited integration for some pupils. In such cases, the parents will be advised by the Principal to seek a more appropriate educational setting.

It is expected that every effort will be made that pupils in ASD classes participate with the relevant mainstream class in school concerts, tours and other school activities.

Teaching and Learning:

The children will access a curriculum based on the Primary School Curriculum that is matched to their needs and capacities through carefully planned individual learning activities and through the use of differentiation strategies in group activities. Subject areas include: English, Maths, Social, Emotional and Scientific Education (SESE), Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Music, Visual Arts, Drama and Physical Education. All ASD children are exempt from Irish but they can still access it in their main stream classes. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities will be used to augment the implementation of the curriculum.

The special class teachers shall continue to prepare an IEP (Individual Education Plan) for each child.

Preparation of the IEP will be done in consultation with the child's parents and in liaison with the mainstream class teachers.

For new pupils, a substantial draft of each IEP will be completed within six weeks of the first term (or within six weeks of the child starting school.)

The special class teachers will review all the children's IEPs no less than every six months, in consultation with the child's parents and in liaison with the other staff who work with the child (and other professionals, as appropriate.)

An eclectic approach shall continue to be used within the special classes, that is, a range of teaching approaches (including those used in the school's mainstream classes) shall be employed, based on the individual needs of the children.

The main approaches are as follows: play, language through play, Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication-handicapped Children (TEACCH), Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA), if teacher is trained in this particular area, Intensive Interaction and Relationship Development and Floor time, Social Stories will also be used.

Visual schedules showing daily tasks and activities are used where appropriate. Then the pupils graduate to using timetables.

The assessment tools in use in the special classes (in addition to the tools in use in our other settings, are:

- a) Where appropriate to the needs of the child, the Assessment of Basic Learning and Language skills (ABLLS). The ABLLS will usually be administered at the following intervals: 6 or 12 months.
- b) The Assessment of Functional and Living Skills (AFLS)

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The implementation of the Primary School Curriculum will be enhanced through a programme of trips to local places, designed to help further prepare the child for successful living in our community (playground visits, coffee shop, shopping tasks, post office, forest walk, swimming, seasonal activities etc.) Typically developing peers may also participate in elements of this programme.

The school may run a Summer Programme. This programme will be funded by the Department of Education and Skills. The Board of Management will evaluate the success or otherwise of the programme each year. (The Board has already decided that the running of a Summer programme in any school year will be dependent on the availability of an overseer from within the school staff. The principal will not be the overseer of the July programme.)

Protocols:

This policy document also reiterates the school's commitment to develop a school culture and practice in which the identity of every child is given active support. In practice, this commits the school to a number of undertakings:

- ◆ Staff continuing to access training in relation to the education of children with autism (through the Special Education Support Service (SESS) or other providers)
- ◆ Special class teachers and mainstream class teachers, in so far as possible, identifying and implementing the supports and accommodations that children with autism may need to be successful in typical (and/or desirable) school activities. There is close alignment and tracking of the programmes of learning for pupils as they transition across mainstream, support and special class settings throughout the school day is required.
- ◆ Pupils and teachers devising regular connections between our special classes and a number of our mainstream classes, e.g. weekly shared activity, such as motor skills obstacle course; developing talking partner systems; developing playground buddy systems, etc.
- ◆ The school principal and the special class teachers working to increase the visibility of the special classes amongst the wider school community.
- ◆ Board of Management members enabling the implementation of all such initiatives.

Staffing and continuing professional development

The National Council for Special Education sanctions the employment of staff as follows: one registered teacher and two special needs assistants (SNAs) per six-pupil class.

Further SNAs may be applied for in certain circumstances, e.g. where a child has particularly significant care needs, which cannot be met by the class SNAs and may warrant the allocation of additional SNA support.

The school principal will progress application for additional SNAs if he/she deems this to be necessary, in consultation with the child's parents.

In most cases, SNAs will not be assigned to the individual children. They will be assigned to a classroom or to a group (or pair) of pupils. The SNAs will work with different pupils so that the children learn to accept change and learn to generalise behaviour. While this may result in some short-term disruption (in terms of absolute consistency), it will be of benefit to the children in the longer term.

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The Special class teachers and SNAs have experience of, or an interest in, working with children with Autism.

The Board will continue to support the accessing of Continuing Professional Development by staff. In general, relevant specialist training is accessed via the Special Support Service.

Some disruption to the workings of the special classes can be expected when the special class teachers and/or the special needs assistants access training courses. Parents will be given as much notice as possible in these cases.

Multidisciplinary Support

The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides educational psychology support to the school. This can include support re: the learning, behaviour, social and/or emotional development of individual children, through consultation and assessment.

Health Service Executive (HSE) therapies are generally not provided at the school (such as Occupational Therapy and Speech/Language Therapy) However, where a child accesses such supports in a local clinic or health centre those professionals will liaise with the special class teachers and/or visit the school from time to time.

From time to time, the school uses funds raised to provide support services such as Occupational Therapy or Music Therapy. This continued provision of such support services cannot be guaranteed.

Code of Behaviour

The school's existing Code of Behaviour applies to all school settings and activities, including the workings of the special classes.

The issue of physical behaviour/physical aggression could become more pertinent as the children grow older.

Parents should note that this school will not apply any regular 'restraint' or 'secure-unit' type model for older (or physically strong) pupils i.e. if the school felt that we could do no more for any child in this regard we would engage with parents about possible alternative placements. The safety of all pupils is of paramount importance. If a pupil's behaviour threatens his/her own safety or the safety of others, parents will be asked to remove the pupil from the school temporarily or permanently. Reducing the length of the school day for individual pupils may also be considered. The school reserves the right to suspend or expel a pupil in accordance with the school's Code of Behaviour and Discipline.

Key roles and responsibilities:

The responsibilities of the special class teacher include:

- ◆ Being the main point of contact for the child's parents.
- ◆ Involving parents in the educational process e.g. Individual Plans (IEP), home-school journals, participation in some classroom/school activities, etc.
- ◆ Preparing a new pupil's IEP within 6 weeks of the first term of the school year, in consultation with parents and in liaison with other staff working with the child.
- ◆ Initiating a review of the IEP within 6 months (usually during Term 2)

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- ◆ Planning and implementing educational provisions for the children enrolled in the special class. Ensuring breadth and balance (SESE, arts SPHE, etc. as well as language and maths, etc) Using long and short-term planning to enable progression over time.
- ◆ Coordinating the supporting work of the special needs assistants on an ongoing basis.
- ◆ Working with the mainstream class teacher to identify regular opportunities for integration.
- ◆ Working with the mainstream class teacher to identify and implement accommodations that the child with autism may need to be successful in the mainstream classroom.

The responsibilities of the mainstream class teacher include:

- ◆ Working with the special class teacher to identify regular opportunities for integration (e.g. regular/timetabled activities or lessons; once-off class or school activities etc.)
- ◆ Working with the special class teacher (and special needs assistants) to implement accommodation that the child with autism may need to be successful in the mainstream classroom, (e.g. controlling teaching vocabulary, using additional visual supports, modifying behavioural programmes, co-teaching scenarios, etc.)
- ◆ Ensuring that pupils and teachers in the ASD classes are kept informed of any timetable changes or out of classroom activities in the mainstream class.

The responsibilities of the Special Needs Assistants include (as assigned by the school principal or another teacher as determined by the Principal)

- ◆ Assisting with the care/safety/supervision needs of the children-in the classrooms and around the school, on the playground and on school trips.
- ◆ Assisting with behavioural management programmes. Accompanying the child on movement breaks or self-regulation breaks.
- ◆ Guiding the child through tasks and activities designed by the special class teacher or the mainstream class teacher.
- ◆ Data collection/reporting on progress, as determined by the special class teacher
- ◆ Providing special assistance to the children, as necessary e.g using computers and other equipment, help with written tasks, etc.
- ◆ Preparing materials/resources for the children, under the guidance of the special class teacher or the mainstream class teacher.

This policy was developed following a consultation process involving all staff members.

It was ratified by the Board of Management on 11/10/21

It will be reviewed in September 2023

Signed: 

Chairperson