



St Francis National School

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Autism Class Policy

In reading this policy, it should be noted that the term "Parent(s)" also includes Guardians and should be interpreted as such.

Our Mission Statement

St. Francis NS Autism class, Síológa, was opened in August 2021. A Second Autism class was opened in August 2022. These classes are funded and resourced by the Department of Education and Skills. The classes celebrate the uniqueness of each child as expressed in the child's personality, intelligence and potential for development. The Autism classes, in conjunction with the rest of the school community, seeks to nurture the child in all dimensions of his or her life – spiritual, moral, cognitive, emotional, imaginative, social and physical.

Our curriculum aims to enable each child:

- To live a full life as a child and to realise their potential as a unique individual.
- To develop as a social being, through living and co-operating with others and so contribute to the good of society.
- To prepare for further education and lifelong learning.

We aim to provide quality learning experiences that are engaging, enriching and stimulating through a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum. We strive to provide an inclusive environment responsive to the needs of all and we promote and value lifelong learning for all. We urge all the school partners to work together, in good faith, to reinforce the shared values of home and school.

Aims and Objectives

The primary aim of our Autism classes is to provide a supportive, caring learning environment which facilitates the nurturing of each pupil's full educational potential. The pursuit of this aim informs all of the planning processes and activities which occur in our school. With a team of dedicated teachers and special needs assistants, the school provides individual programmes in classes of up to 6 children catering for the uniqueness of each pupil's personality and needs. The principal, teachers, support staff and parents are partners in their

children's education with co-operation and communication between home and school being of vital importance in the educational process.

Our primary objectives are:

- To provide a quality driven, appropriate educational service to each child in the autism classes within the requirements of all legislation pertaining to Special Needs Education.
- To strive towards the integration of children in the autism classes into mainstream education, having regard for levels of ability, available resources and suitability for such integration.
- To enhance the communicative and social skills of the children in the autism classes.

HSE Support Services

A guarantee of support by outside agencies such as HSE cannot be provided. Children who require speech therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy etc. will be dependent on the local HSE services. The school will aim to enact all recommendations made by HSE qualified professionals, in regard to an individual pupil, through the School Support Plus process, with due regard to the resources available to the school.

Routines and General Information

- The school day runs from 8.50am to 1.30pm for junior pupils and from 8.50am to 2.30pm for senior pupils.
- There is a 15 minute small break and a half hour lunch break.
- Pupils who avail of DES transport will be escorted to the bus by a member of the Síológa staff, where they will be met by the bus escort, also an employee of St Francis NS.
- A brief synopsis of the child's daily activities / attainments is communicated in writing to parents every day by means of our online activity and communication app, Seesaw. Regular home/school communication is an essential element of the education of a child with autism. Parents should check the pupil's Seesaw account daily and report all applicable useful information in the diary.
- All St Francis NS Policies / message notifications / circulars apply to the autism classes unless otherwise indicated.
- As per mainstream schooling, parents are expected to contribute towards the cost of insurance, resources, stationery and extra-curricular activities as they arise.
- The school is committed to continuing the positive, open relationship with all parents. Parents wishing to discuss specific issues relating to their child should do so with their child's class teacher, arranging an appointment over the phone with the school secretary.

Integration and Inclusion of Pupils from the Autism Class into Mainstream Classes

The school strives to integrate pupils from the ASD classroom into a mainstream classroom. Age, social and curriculum level will all be considered when integrating a child into a mainstream class. Integration will be on a phased basis and always based on the individual needs of the child.

The school staff will agree on the amount of integration that a child receives by taking all available information, including advice from outside professionals and available resources into account.

Aims:

1. To provide a teaching and learning experience that enables pupils from the autism class to become exposed to learning in a mainstream setting.
2. To enable the children in the mainstream classes to observe and interact with children from the autism classes, encouraging understanding and tolerance.
3. To develop the social skills and self-esteem of the children in the autism classes.

Implementation:

The school recommends that a maximum of 2 children per class be integrated at any given time. Early levels of integration into mainstream will be on a social level only. The child from an autism class will not partake in general class learning until they are able to:

- Enter the class without trepidation
- Follow teacher instructions
- Interact with peers on a social level
- Have lunch with the whole class
- Engage in a 'buddy system' at playtime

Curricular Integration:

Having adjusted on a social level, the child from an autism class will, on a phased basis, be introduced to areas of the curriculum appropriate to their individual needs. The children will be involved in as many aspects of the school life as possible i.e. school sports day and other activities/ celebrations.

Reverse Integration:

This is organised for up to 3-4 children from a mainstream class who join the Síológa pupils in their classes. The objective of this approach is that this will in the long term lead to conventional integration with a mainstream class.

Enrolment Policy to Autism Classes

St. Francis NS, with the approval of the Minister for Education and Skills, established one class in August 2021 and a second in August 2022 to provide an education exclusively for students with Autism.

Enrolment in the class is irrespective of age and/or cognitive ability. The class will be co-educational and will cater for children of primary school age only – i.e. four years to thirteen years.

Where a place in the Síológa classes becomes available, all applications which have been received on or before the date stipulated on the Annual Admissions Statement on our website in the year prior to enrolment will be considered for first round offers.

The application will undergo assessment by the Admission Team (the admission team is made up of the Principal Mrs. Lawless, Deputy Principal Mrs. O'Rourke, the ASD coordinator and a member of the SET team) to ensure that the application fulfils the enrolment criteria outlined in this policy.

The Department of Education & Skills states that the ratio for each class is a maximum of six pupils to one teacher and two SNAs. There must be more than three pupils to access the second SNA.

Criteria for enrolment in the Special Class for children with Autism:

The maximum class size in each special class is **six** pupils.

The Board of Management reserves the right to enrol less than this if it is deemed in the best interests of the class, the children and the school.

In order for a child to be enrolled in the class for Autism, a place must be available and they must **fully** fulfil the following criteria:-

- A full psychological assessment specifying Autism by a clinical /educational psychologist or psychiatrist, with a recommendation of placement in an ASD specific class. This report should be recent, within the last 24 months, and **MUST** include the results of a DSM-5 or ICD 10 assessment.
- Application Form – fully completed, including the relevant Psychological Report dated within the last 24 months.
- A multi-disciplinary report is also valuable, and should be presented to the school at the earliest possible date.

If the number of children on the list of applicants to enrol exceeds the number of places available, the following criteria will apply in priority order, beginning with number one – subject to meeting all the criteria and completing all the procedures outlined in this policy.

1. Children currently in a mainstream class in St. Francis NS for whom enrolment in an Autism class is deemed a more suitable learning environment – priority to the eldest;
2. Children who have a parent/grandparent who is a staff member - priority to the eldest;
3. Siblings/step-siblings currently enrolled in the school or who have attended the school in the past - priority to the eldest;
4. Children currently attending an Autism Early Intervention class for whom enrolment in an Autism class is deemed a more suitable learning

- environment and who live **within** the catchment area of Haggardstown & Blackrock - priority to the eldest;
5. Children currently attending an Autism Early Intervention class for whom enrolment in an autism class is deemed a more suitable learning environment and who live **outside** the catchment area of Haggardstown /Blackrock - priority to the eldest;
 6. Children residing in the catchment area of Haggardstown/Blackrock - priority to the eldest;
 7. Children residing outside the Haggardstown/Blackrock catchment area - priority to the eldest.
 8. Suitability of the learning environment for placement of children
 9. The child nearest the school by road journey as defined on Google Maps.

An offer of a place must be accepted in writing with proof of address within two weeks from date of receipt of the offer.

The Board of Management will not refuse a child on the basis of ethnicity, disability, traveller status, refugee status, political beliefs, family or social circumstances, provided they fulfil the enrolment criteria.

Taking this into account and based on the advice of the Admissions Team, the Board of Management may refuse the admission of a pupil if:

1. The class is oversubscribed.
2. The parents have refused to accept and support school policy.
3. The Board of Management forms the opinion that the child is a danger to themselves and others.
4. The child has such complex needs that, even with additional resources available from the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Health, the school cannot provide the student with an education in line with the assessments, recommendations and needs analysis received, and the Student Support file drawn up by their previous school if applicable.

Note: The Board of Management reserves the right to take other factors into account which it deems to be relevant.

Discharge Policy

It is school policy to facilitate the discharge of pupils from the class once they have completed 6th class and/or reached the age of twelve after September 30th in any year.

Discharge may also be recommended if the Admissions Team, after consultation with the parents, feel that placement is not appropriate.

Discharge from the class may also happen if a pupil is fully integrated into the mainstream school.

Home-Based / School Based Summer Programme

The school does not provide a home-based or school-based Summer Programme (formerly called July provision).

Evaluation

The Board of Management will monitor the implementation of all aspects of this policy.

Communication

This policy will be available in the Plean Scoile and on the school website.

Responsibility for Review:

All members of staff, Parent Association and Board of Management

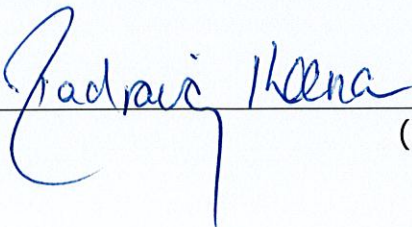
Review of the Policy

This policy will be reviewed in conjunction with the school Admissions and Enrolment policy.

Next Review: June 2027

Autism Class Policy

Ratified by the Board of Management on 17/11/2023 (Date)

Signed:  (Chairperson, Board of Management)