

*St Joseph's
National School
Rehins, Ballina,
Co. Mayo*



Autism Class Policy

Introduction

‘Autism is a neurological condition characterised by differences in how a person interacts with the world around them’ (Asiam.ie). The Autism Class attempts to enable all students with Autism to belong to an educational community without prejudice and within which individual difference is celebrated. The class reflects the inclusive ethos of St. Joseph’s NS and wherever possible the students in the Autism Class are integrated within the mainstream school.

Vision

We, the staff of St. Joseph’s NS Rehins, aim to offer a positive, meaningful educational experience which allows the child to develop to their full learning potential in an environment that offers clarity, ability, understanding and calm. The purpose of the Autism classrooms is to provide a positive learning environment, which will foster the academic, social and emotional development of students with Autism. We aim to empower our students to leave school with the skills necessary to participate, to the best of their ability, in an inclusive way in society and to live independent and fulfilled lives.

Aims and Objectives of our Autism Classrooms

- Promote the use of positive language
- Identify the criteria for pre-enrolment and explain the procedure for enrolment to the Autism Class.
- Outline the key roles and responsibilities of the Principal, Autism Class teacher, mainstream teacher, and Additional Needs Assistants (ANAs)
- Explain approaches to integration and inclusion for the children in the Autism Class
- Describe approaches to teaching and learning
- Encourage participation in Autistic specific Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in order to enrich teaching in the Autism Classes
- Explain the role of outside agencies
- Outline the equipment, material and resources used within the Autism Classes
- Establish the link between the Code of Behaviour and the classes for children with Autism
- Establish the link between the Safeguarding-Staff Safeguarding-Children Policy and the Autism Classes.
- To attempt to meet the sensory needs of students in ASD Class by providing access to sensory regulation and sensory integration rooms. To provide a whole school response to the needs of students with ASD within the overall ethos of the school.

- To provide a safe, nurturing and happy environment in which students are guided and supported.
- To facilitate every aspect of the student's education from his transfer from primary school to his transition to secondary school/further education upon completion of his/her education at St. Joseph's NS

Positive Language

We use the term "Autism Class(es)". We do not use the term "autism unit" or "autistic class" (although these terms may be used in some Department of Education & Skills (DES) and National Council for Special Education (NCSE) correspondence). Where young typically developing children have questions about the personality and/or behaviours of a child on the autistic spectrum we answer those questions in a matter-of-fact, positive way. Often, practical differences are explained. Sometimes, depending on the age of the children it may be appropriate to use the word "autism" if that would help avoid misunderstandings. This would be done only with parental/guardian consent.

Criteria for Enrolment

Children must have a diagnosis of an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (i.e. Childhood Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Asperger's Syndrome, mild Autism, Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified) made using the DSM-IV, DSM-V or ICD 10 and a letter from a psychologist stating that the child requires a special class setting. A recent (no more than 2 years old) psychological assessment or a report from a multi-disciplinary team should be provided. A multi-disciplinary team may consist of a Clinical Psychologist, Occupational Therapist, Speech & Language Therapist, Social Worker and a Physiotherapist.

****See separate Autism Enrolment Policy****

Admissions Team for Classes for Children with ASD

Each application will be considered by the Admissions Team.

The team will include:

- The school Principal
- Autism Class Coordinator
- Autism Class Teacher

A recommendation will be made in relation to each application to the BOM of the school. The BOM has the right to endorse or overrule any decision made by the Admissions Team.

Discharge from the Classes for Children with Autism

1. It is school policy to facilitate the discharge of pupils from the Autism Classes once they have completed 6th class or have turned 14 years of age before the first day of the first term of the new school year.

2. Discharge for the purposes of full integration into the mainstream class may also be recommended at the end of any given school year, following consultation with the parents/guardians and relevant professionals.

We participate in an annual transitioning programme with the local secondary schools that the “leaving” children will be attending.

Key Roles and Responsibilities

Principal

- Assume overall responsibility for the development and implementation of the policy in co-operation with the BOM, Teachers, parents/guardians and children
- Monitor the implementation of the policy on an ongoing basis
 - Keep relevant teachers informed about the external assessment services that are available and the procedure to be followed in relation to referrals within the Autism Class setting
- Keep Teachers abreast of relevant CPD to increase their knowledge and skills in the area of ASD
- Being a member of the admissions team
- Upholding the Code of Behaviour of the school, where appropriate
- Ensure that all Autism Class staff have received the appropriate training in conjunction with the Safeguarding Staff Safeguarding Children Policy.

Autism Class Teacher (ACT)

The Autism Class Teacher helps to provide an education which meets the needs and abilities of children assessed as having a diagnosis of autism. The ACT teaches children with exceptional and average IQ along with children with mild to moderate learning difficulties. In addition, the ACT will advise and liaise with other teachers, parents and other professionals in the pupil’s interests. More specifically, the Autism Class Teacher has responsibility for:

- Being the main point of contact for the child’s parents/guardians
- Involving parents in the educational process, eg. School Support Plus Plans, etc...
- Preparing new pupils’ School Support Plus Plan within six 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 that School Support Plus Plan each term and organising venue, date and time to consult with parents, mainstream class teacher and ANAs
- Co-ordinating the supporting work of the Additional Needs Assistants (ANAs) on an ongoing basis
- Planning and implementing educational provision for children enrolled in the autism class. School Support Plus Plans are used as long-term planning and monthly plans for short-term planning to enable progression over time

- Working with the mainstream class teacher to identify regular opportunities for integration or reverse integration, where appropriate
- Working with the mainstream class teacher to identify and implement accommodations that the autistic child may need to be successful in the mainstream classroom, where appropriate
- Upholding the Code of Behaviour of the school, where appropriate

Special Needs Assistants

- 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 the behavioural management programmes
- Guiding the child through tasks and activities designed by the multi-class teacher or the mainstream class teacher
- Data collection/reporting on progress as determined by the multi-class teacher or Principal
- Providing additional assistance to children as necessary
- Preparing materials/resources for the children, under the guidance of the autism class teacher or the mainstream class teacher
- Providing input, where appropriate, during the review stages of the School Support Plus Plans and attending School Support Plus Plan review meetings, where possible

Mainstream Class Teacher

- Collaborating with the autism class teacher to identify regular opportunities for integration and where deemed beneficial, for reverse integration
- Collaborating with the autism class teacher and SNAs to implement accommodations necessary for the child with autism to participate as fully as possible in the mainstream class activities
- Providing input, where appropriate, during the review stage of the School Support Plans

Role of parent(s)/ guardian(s)

Partnership with parents/ guardians plays a crucial role in enabling students who attend the Autism Class to achieve their potential.

Parents/ guardians are regarded as the primary educators of their child and their input and involvement at every stage of their son's education is encouraged and valued.

The role includes;

- Keeping the school informed about issues which may impact on their son's ability to perform on a given day.
- Working collaboratively with staff in planning and implementing SSPs.
- Supporting their son in their understanding of expected behaviours as prescribed by the school policy.

Communication with parent(s)/guardian(s) is on-going. This is done through the home school journal and/or text messaging/ phone calls/ emails. Meetings with parent(s)/guardian(s) are held at least twice yearly to review progress and plan future targets. Parent(s) guardian(s) are encouraged to support the school in working with their child.

Planning

The autism class teacher is responsible for meeting the following planning requirements:

- SSP-School Support Plan for each child/Individual Educational Plan
- Fortnightly individual plans (based on assessment and SMART targets set in SSP)
- Cuntas Miosuil
- Behaviour plan-this may be required if specific behaviour management strategies and approaches need to be implemented for individual children.

Assessment

The autism class teacher is required to keep an assessment folder with information relating to the learning progress of the pupils. Assessment methods will be similar to those that are employed in mainstream classes:

- Checklists
- Observation profiles
- Teacher designed tasks and tests
- Portfolio of work(work samples)

Autism-specific assessment and profiling tools will be used to get a baseline of the child's abilities, identify areas for development/targets and also monitor progress. These assessments will be used to set specific individualised targets for pupils' School Support Plans. Autism-specific tools may include:

- Psychoeducational Profile-Third Edition(PEP-3)
- VB-Mapp

Integration and Inclusion

Integration with typically developing peers in inclusive mainstream classroom environments, in so far as possible, is the school's aim. The nature of all integration shall be determined by the Autism Class teacher following reviews at appropriate intervals and in consultation with the parents/guardians, mainstream class teacher, Principal and SNAs. "Partial Integration" will take the form of contact during specific situations or curricular areas, where particular skills and interests and/or learning can be advanced. "Increasing Integration" will be put in place for children who are successful in the integrated setting. Success criteria will be based on the level of meaningful learning and functioning within the setting. "Reverse Integration" will be put in place for children where integration in the integrated setting is not appropriate. It can be used as a stepping stone to and/or in conjunction with Partial Integration. The focus of "Reverse Integration" will be on social and play skills only. The minimum level of integration and inclusion for all pupils, where appropriate, will include some lunch times, some group activities and some playground breaks.

Classroom Environment

The children in the autism classrooms will be provided with a calm and safe room, consistent with the principles of Treatment & Education of Autistic and related Community Handicapped Children (TEACCH). The room will be adapted to cater for the children's specific needs. When designing the layout of the room the class teacher will:

- Keep the walls free from unnecessary posters, charts & pictures.
- Keep toys that are not being used in closed cupboards/boxes.
- Keep surfaces clutter free.
- Provide individual workstations for each child.
- Assign specific areas for individual work, group work, lunch, play, calm down & reading/relaxing.
- Provide visual timetables (schedules) for each of the children.

Each Autism Classroom has a "Quiet Room" within the room. The door to the "quiet room" will be left open at all times. Children in the Autism Class will also have access to a sensory room and an area for OT, along with a separate outdoor space away from the mainstream yards.

The children in the autism classes will have access to equipment and resources which are recommended in their psychological reports, occupational therapy reports and speech & language therapy reports, where possible. When a recommendation is made for a child for a specific piece of equipment such as a sit and lean cushion, a slant board, etc. the parents/guardians of the child will be expected to pay for the equipment and as such it is the property of the child. Resources such as theraputty, therabands, fine motor equipment and gross motor equipment will be, where possible, provided by the school. Resources and Assessment Kits, for example the VB-MAPP kit, PEP-3 kit, **ABLLS and Board Maker CD-ROM**, will remain in the autism class classrooms and can be loaned to additional education teachers and mainstream teachers, where needed.

Approaches to Teaching and Learning

The children will access a curriculum based on the Primary School Curriculum that is matched to their needs and capabilities, through carefully planned School Support Plus Plans and through the use of differentiation strategies.

Subject areas include; English, Maths, Social Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE), Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Music, Visual Arts, Drama, Physical Education.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessments Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities will be used to augment the implementation of the curriculum. The Department of Education circular 0052/2019, states that all children in Special Classes may be exempt from Gaeilge. Parents/guardians of children in the Autism Classes who wish to avail of this exemption are free to do so in consultation with teaching staff and the Principal. Those who would like to learn Gaeilge, may do so in consultation with the aforementioned staff. It is the responsibility of the parents that their child has the appropriate exemption.

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

The implementation of the primary school curriculum will be enhanced through a programme of trips to local places, designed to help further prepare the children for successful living in our community (playground visits, coffee shop, shopping tasks, post office, swimming, etc.). Typically developing peers may also participate in elements of this programme

Communication

Communication with children

Positive communication in any form is encouraged. Communication may take the form of facial expressions, gestures, Lámh, vocalisations, oral language, visual schedules, PECS, writing, drawing etc.

When speaking with the children (and taking into account each child's individual communication needs) the adults may need to adapt their own oral language in the following ways:

- Keep instructions and comments at the appropriate level (usually at the child's language level or one step ahead, e.g., if a child is using one-word utterances, then the staff member should mainly use 1 and 2 word utterances).
- Give the child extra time to process your instructions.
- Repeat the instruction if necessary.
- Use gestures, facial expressions, signs, intonation, pictures etc. to help the child understand the message.
- Cut out unnecessary noise and language.
- Be aware that autistic children can be very literal in their interpretation of language and adapt your language accordingly.

Communication with parents/guardians

The autism class teacher should always be the first point of contact for parents. If an issue cannot be resolved, then the principal can be contacted. Parents will have access to the class teacher via a direct email address or class dojo login. If parents wish to speak to the class teacher by phone, they can request a call back through the school landline number.

Code of Behaviour

The school Code of Behaviour applies to all children in the school, including the children in the Autism classes. It is accepted that children with autism may display challenging, defiant or oppositional behaviour. All efforts will be made by the school to manage such behaviours according to specific strategies outlined in a child's behaviour plan. **See school behaviour policy

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

The BOM will support the accessing of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) by staff. Relevant specialist training is accessed via the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and relevant personnel on staff. A list of other courses available from the available from the NCSE, Middletown Centre for Autism, various education centres as well as from other organisations. All staff of the autism classrooms will have up to date Behaviours of concern training, Man handling, Health and Safety- in that epi pen was included, First Aid Training, Epi pen training and Epilepsy training

The Role of Outside Services

Support from outside services such as the Health Service Executive (HSE), the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), etc., is available to the children and parents/guardians of the autism classes. However, due to a lack of resources and long waiting lists these resources are extremely limited. No HSE therapies, such as Occupational Therapy or Speech & Language Therapy are provided at the school. However, where a child has access to such supports in a local clinic, health centre or in a private capacity, those professionals will liaise with the Autism Class teachers and/or visit the school from time to time

Confidentiality

Pupils and staff will be treated with dignity and respect at all times. Issues relating to the behaviours or care needs of the children should not be discussed with staff (teachers, SNAs, bus escorts etc) outside of the classroom or principal's office.

Reference to Other Policies

The Autism Class Policy is linked to other policies within the school;

- The Code of Behaviour Policy

- Admissions and Participation Policy, including enrolment in the Autism Class
- Safeguarding Staff Safeguarding Children Policy
- Special Educational Needs Policy
- Toileting and intimate care needs

Summary

This policy has covered the use of positive language, the criteria for pre-enrolment and enrolment in the autism classes, it also discusses the criteria for discharge from the classes. It outlines the roles and responsibilities for the main stakeholders involved. It explains approaches to integration and inclusion, teaching and learning and Continuing Professional Development. The policy has determined equipment, materials and resources made available to the multi-classes. The links to other school policies have been outlined also.

Success Criteria

Our Autism Class Policy will be seen to be working well when;

- We receive positive feedback from staff members and parents/guardians
- All staff are made aware of and are committed to the principles that are outlined in this policy
- A quality driven, appropriate educational service is provided to all children in the multi-classes, within the requirements of all recent legislation pertaining to Additional Needs Education
- All efforts are made to ensure the integration and inclusion of children in the Autism Classes into mainstream education, having regard for levels of disability, available resources and suitability for such integration
- The aims set out at the beginning of this policy are achieved

Roles and Responsibility

All staff of the school, under the positive and supportive leadership of the Board of Management and Principal, have both a role and a responsibility in successfully implementing this policy. The policy will be monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis by the policy committee through feedback from members of the school community.

Implementation Date

This policy will be implemented in October 2025. Amendments will be implemented immediately.

Timetable for Review

This policy is to be reviewed during the school year 2027/2028

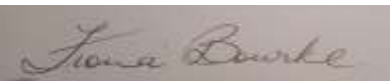
Ratification and Communication

The amended policy will be communicated to members of the Board of Management prior to the meeting of the BOM on 16/10/2025. Parents will be made aware in the next school communication that the policy is available for viewing by appointment in the school.

Signed: 

Date: 16/10/2025

Chairperson of the board

Signed: 

Date: 16/10/2025

Principal