



St Patrick's BNS Autism Class Policy



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

NCCA 

Introductory Statement:

This policy was formulated in order to clarify the roles and responsibilities of all staff in advance of the opening of the special class for children with autism in St Patrick's BNS in September 2023.

Aims:

The aims of the policy are:

- To outline the roles and responsibilities of the Principal, Autism Class Teachers, SEN Co-ordinator, mainstream class teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)
- To provide guidelines on the development of a suitable, positive learning environment, including the appropriate use of language
- To outline approaches to integration and inclusion for children in the special classes
- To outline approaches to teaching and learning
- To outline planning and paperwork requirements
- To encourage participation in autism-specific Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) in order to enrich teaching and learning in the special classes
- To establish the link between the Code of Behaviour and classes for children with autism

Roles and Responsibilities:

Below is an overview of the roles and responsibilities of staff working with the children in the autism class. Further detail is provided on some of these points in subsequent sections of this policy.

School Management

- Assume overall responsibility for the development and implementation of this policy in cooperation with Board of Management, staff, parents and children
- Staffing arrangements - teachers, SNAs, support staff, substitutes, bus escorts etc.
- Uphold the Code of Behaviour of the school
- Management of the enrolment process

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support staff to build upon their knowledge and expertise in the area of autism through continuous professional development
Autism Class Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being the main point of contact for the child's parents/guardians • Developing a suitable classroom environment • Coordinating and implementing education and behaviour plans • Communicating plans and strategies to SNAs and other relevant staff • Fulfilling planning and paperwork requirements • Coordinating the supporting work of the SNAs on an ongoing basis • Collaborating with mainstream teachers to identify meaningful opportunities for integration and coordinating necessary accommodations for the integration to take place • Upholding the school's Code of Behaviour
SNAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assisting with the care/safety and supervision needs of the children • Assisting with behaviour management programmes • Guiding the child through tasks and activities designed by the special class or mainstream class teacher • Data collection or reporting on progress as determined by the autism class teacher or principal • Preparing materials and resources for the autism class as directed by the autism class teacher • Providing input during review of School Support Plan
Mainstream Class Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

Classroom Environment:

The children in the autism classroom 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

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. If parents wish to speak to the class teacher by phone, they can request a call back.

The School Day

The school day starts at 8:55 am. It finishes at 1:40 pm for all infant classes and at 2:40 pm for all other classes.

Break times are as follows:

Breaktime	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
10:10-10:25	SNA 1 & 2	SNA 3	SNA 1 & 2	SNA 3	SNA 1 & 2
10:25-10:40	Class teacher	Class teacher	Class teacher	Class teacher	Class teacher
10:40-10:55	SNA 3	SNA 1 & 2	SNA 3	SNA 1 & 2	SNA 3

Lunch	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
11:20-11:50	SNA 1 & 2	SNA 3	SNA 1 & 2	SNA 3	SNA 1 & 2
11:55 - 12:25	Class teacher	Class teacher	Class teacher	Class teacher	Class teacher
12:25-12:55	SNA 3	SNA 1 & 2	SNA 3	SNA 1 & 2	SNA 3

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)
- Quest diagnostic test

Approaches to Learning and Teaching:

Pupils in the autism class will access an education based on the Primary School Curriculum, which will be adapted according to their individual needs and capabilities through carefully planned differentiation and appropriate teaching methodologies. The NCSE Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities may be used to augment the implementation of the curriculum.

Children attending a special class are automatically exempt from instruction in Irish. However, our pupils will be provided with opportunities to participate in Irish language and cultural activities that are appropriate to their learning needs.

The Stay Safe and RSE programmes are compulsory and must be delivered at an appropriately differentiated level as part of the whole school SPHE plan.

Teaching methodologies will include, but are not limited to:

- Aistear/Play based learning
- Treatment & Education of Autistic and related Community Handicapped Children (TEACCH)
- Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
- Social stories

Integration:

Pupils in the autism class will have opportunities to play, socialise and learn alongside their peers in the mainstream class. All integration will be coordinated by those working with the child after meeting the child's parents to discuss same.

- ❖ Clear goals will be agreed and set by all those involved
- ❖ The autism class teacher and the mainstream class teacher will agree a time when integration can take place, which will be of greatest benefit to the pupil and the mainstream class
- ❖ Initially the period of integration will be kept short to allow the child to become accustomed to a different environment. This time period will gradually be increased whilst always being cognisant of the child's needs
- ❖ The autism class teacher will keep parents informed of progress made during integration periods
- ❖ The pupil from the autism class will be supported prior to and during integration through the use of visuals, simple and clear explanations, going on short visits/messages to the mainstream teacher, adaptations in the classroom etc.
- ❖ Reverse integration will be organised for any child who is unable to tolerate integration into a different classroom setting
- ❖ Small groups of children (2 or 3) of a similar age from other classes will be invited to visit the autism classroom for play and social interaction on a rotational basis
- ❖ Pupils from the autism class will participate as much as possible in whole school events such as assemblies, sports days, fun days, school tours and other gatherings. Adaptations will be put in place where possible to allow for greatest possible participation.

Planning:

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

- SSP - School Support Plan for each child
- 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.

Code of Behaviour:

The school Code of Behaviour applies to all children in the school, including the children in the special class for autism. 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.

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.

Wellbeing

The wellbeing of all our pupils is of utmost importance in St Patrick's BNS. It is acknowledged that the children attending the special class may need extra support to help safeguard and foster their wellbeing. The following supports are in place:

- Total communication approach: All types of positive communication will be fostered and encouraged, including but not limited to; visual prompts and schedules, use of gestures and Lámh signs, PECS, oral language, drawings, written messages, use of technology etc.
- Calm environment: the children will be provided with a calm and safe classroom. Their sensory needs will be catered for by providing a quiet, dark calm down area within the classroom and a multi-sensory area.
- Positive relationships: a key cohort of staff will consistently work within the special class and all efforts will be made to foster caring and positive relationships with the children.
- SPHE curriculum: emotional awareness, relaxation, friendship and resilience skills will be taught through the SPHE curriculum.
- Communication with parents: a two way open communication approach is strongly encouraged, with the child's wellbeing central to all interactions.

In relation to staff, it is acknowledged that the autism class can be a high-energy, busy environment to work in. The following supports are in place to safeguard and foster staff wellbeing:

- Team meetings: staff are encouraged to check in with one another informally at the end of each day to discuss the day, complete observational notes and to plan for the following day. More formal planning meetings will take place as part of Croke Park hours.
- Meetings with the principal when required, can take place to discuss any issues that arise.
- Break times: Staff working in the autism class should decide together when is best for the various staff breaks to take place. This should be done with a children-first mindset, whilst also ensuring staff have breaks with colleagues as much as possible, to avoid isolation. It is

acknowledged that due to unforeseen circumstances, it is not always possible to take breaks at the designated times. It is advised that staff make every effort to take their breaks at the designated times or as soon as possible afterwards.

- Spectrum Life on behalf of the DE, offers a 24 hour employee assistance service, which includes counselling. They can be contacted on 1800411057.

Toileting and Intimate Care Needs

Please refer to the relevant school policy for information on toileting and intimate care needs.

Teacher Professional Learning:

The Board of Management of St Patrick's BNS supports TPL in the area of autism where appropriate. Specialist training is available from the NCSE, Middletown Centre for Autism, various education centres as well as from other organisations.

Requests for autism related TPL should be brought to the principal. Teachers and SNAs who have specialist training or skills are encouraged to share this information with colleagues.

Policy Review:

The autism class coordinator will arrange a review of this policy in September 2023.

Ratification and Communication:

Signed:

Date: