

# Policy for the Special Class for Children with Autism in Scoil Mhuire

## About Our Special Class

Scoil Mhuire established a special class in 2021 with the aims of catering for children in our school and community on the Autism spectrum (ASD) to address the particular additional educational needs of individuals with this diagnosis. It is intended that the children enrolled in our special class be full and active members of the school community and integrate as fully as is possible for each individual child in school life.

## Aims of Our Special Class

The aims of the Special Class are:

- To deliver an effective and suitable educational service to all children in the Special Class, in compliance with the latest legislation related to Special Needs Education and the guidelines laid out by the NCSE
- To work towards integrating children from the Special Class into mainstream education, considering their levels of ability, available resources, and the appropriateness of such integration.
- To provide an appropriate, safe learning environment for children in the Special Class that caters for their individual learning styles and sensory challenges.

## Enrolment and Admissions

### See the Scoil Mhuire ASD Class Admission Policy

In order for a pupil to access our special class, he/she must have a report from a relevant professional or team of professionals (for example, psychologist, speech and language therapist, psychiatrist) stating that:

- The child has a primary diagnosis of Autism / Autistic Spectrum Disorder without significant intellectual impairment made using the DSM-V by a psychologist or Multi-Disciplinary Team.
- There must be a recommendation in the report that the child has complex learning needs in the mild cognitive range or above and that a special class

placement in a mainstream school is both suitable and necessary , stating the reasons why this is the case.

Under no circumstances will the school place a student in the special class without such a professional report.

When a place becomes available within the class, the school will contact the parents of the child next on the waiting list. The school will send all documentation along with a notification of enrollment to the SENO, who makes the final decision on whether or not that pupil receives the place.

## Transitions

When pupils have been given a place in the Special Class, a meeting will be set up between parents and members of the Scoil Mhuire management to gather essential information about the child to plan successfully for the transition into our Special Class.

This information will include the child's:

- learning needs
- Social and communication needs
- Care needs such as dressing, toileting, medical, feeding needs
- Sensory needs such as sensitivity to noises, textures, lights
- Physical needs that require environmental adaptations such as changes to the school building, adapted seating or other specialised equipment
- Parents' expectations for the child
- All relevant professional reports as well as the names or the current key workers in the child support team and permission to contact these professionals for support and advice when devising targets and reviewing the child's placement in the class.

In order to gain a better understanding of the needs of the child the school may request information from the preschool or school the child is transferring from including observations of the child in the setting, conversations with key workers or teachers, school reports etc

After 8 years of Primary Education, the children in the Special Class will leave the school to transfer to Post-Primary Education. It is the duty of the parents to find a suitable placement in either a mainstream school, a special class in a mainstream school or a special school, whichever is most suitable for the level of support the child needs. For students with complex special educational needs, planning should start two to three years before they move. Ideally, when they are in 4th or 5th class of primary school.

Scoil Mhuire will support this transition by liaising with the relevant teachers or the Additional Needs coordinator in the prospective school and passing on any information that will help the transition including School Support Plans, Care Needs Plans, school reports.

## Roles and Responsibilities

The School Management has the responsibility for:

- for the development and implementation of this policy in co-operation with the BOM, teachers, parents
- all relevant for staffing arrangements, i.e. SNA supports, teachers, substitutes, bus escorts
- upholding the Code of Behaviour of the school
- the management of the enrolment process
- Supporting teachers and SNAs in upskilling in the area of working with children with Autism

The Special Class Teacher will have the responsibility for

- Developing a suitable classroom environment
- Creating and implementing School Support plans including education and behaviour targets
- Communicating plans and strategies to SNAs and other relevant staff
- Fulfilling planning and paperwork requirements
- Co-ordinating the supporting work of the SNAs on an ongoing basis
- Working with mainstream teachers to identify opportunities for meaningful integration and necessary accommodations
- Being the main point of contact for the child's parents/guardians
- Upholding the Code of Behaviour

The Mainstream Class Teacher has the responsibility for:

- working with the Special class teacher to identify regular opportunities for integration or reverse integration, where appropriate
- working with the Special Class teacher and SNAs to implement accommodations that the child with ASD may need to be successful in the mainstream classroom
- being aware of children's learning targets during integration and using appropriate strategies and methodologies, as guided by the ASD class teacher

- providing input, where appropriate, during the review stages of the School Support Plans

The SNAs have the responsibility for:

- assisting with the care, safety and supervision needs of the children – in the classrooms and around the school, on the playground and on school trips
- assisting with behavioural management programmes as outlined in the Support Plan
- guiding the child through tasks and activities designed by the Special Class teacher or the mainstream class teacher
- preparing materials and resources for the children, under the guidance of the class teacher
- providing input during the review stages of the Support Plan

## Staff Development

Teachers, including Special Class teacher, Mainstream class teachers and Support teachers as well as all SNAs will be given the opportunity to engage with continuous professional learning to upskill in methodologies and approaches that are specific to the needs of the pupils enrolled in the Special Class. Training courses and workshops relevant to the needs of the pupils are provided by the NCSE, the Education Centres and Autism support services.

## Approaches to Teaching and Learning

Students in the special class are given the opportunity to access the full range of curricular areas, in line with their abilities, either through differentiated teaching in special or mainstream classes.

The curriculum is adapted according to their individual needs and capabilities through carefully planned differentiation and appropriate teaching methodologies.

Children who have a recommendation for a place in a Special Class for ASD do not necessarily qualify for an exemption from Gaeilge. An exemption must be recommended by a psychologist or a speech and language therapist. This exemption must be applied for through the principal of the school. It is the responsibility of the parents to ensure their child has the appropriate exemption, if necessary.

A wide range of teaching methodologies are used within the Special Class using a multi-sensory approach and incorporating the children's own interests. In addition to the Primary School Curriculum, children with ASD often require specific learning opportunities in the areas of social skills, communication, emotional regulation and practical life skills and learning plans should reflect this need.

As part of their life skills learning, the Special Class teacher may bring the children into the local community to the shop, library, church, local services etc. The ratio of adults to children for such learning excursions is 1:2. Due to Health and Safety reasons, the teacher cannot bring children who may be a risk to the safety of themselves or others on any excursions outside of the school grounds. This includes a child who is a flight risk resulting in the teacher not being able to provide adequate supervision of both the child and the rest of the class.

## Individual Educational Plans

All children in the special class are considered to be in need of the highest level of support the school can offer known as School Support Plus. They will have an individualised learning plan as a part of their School Support Plan. This plan will take into consideration the unique abilities, interests and challenges of the pupil and set out specific learning targets and the time frame in which the teacher aims to achieve these. The setting of learning targets are led by the special class teacher in consultation with the parents/guardians, the mainstream class teacher, the pupil and any other relevant professional or agencies. These plans are recorded and stored on the Aladdin system.

As learning needs may change over time, a student's enrolment in a special class should be kept under continual review by the school. At a minimum, a review should take place once a year and include a careful examination of the student's progress in achieving his/her learning targets.

The review should consider:

- Student's views and those of parents, teachers and other relevant professionals
- The suitability of the special class placement - is the class meeting the child's social, emotional and learning needs.
- Whether the student's needs might be best addressed in a mainstream setting or whether a more supported setting is required (e.g. special school setting).

Following a decision that the Special Class is no longer the most appropriate placement, a student may move to:

- a mainstream class
- a different category of special class or
- a special school.

## Assessment

The assessment requirements in Special Classes for ASD are similar to those in mainstream classes. Teachers are expected to maintain an Assessment Folder that tracks the learning progress of students in the curriculum subjects they are engaging with. However, there should be an additional emphasis on areas such as language and communication, behaviour, social and emotional development, play skills, sensory differences, and independence. The assessment process should be aligned with the individualised planning process to support each student's needs.

Assessment strategies may mirror those used in mainstream classes, when appropriate, such as:

- Checklists
- Observation profiles
- Teacher-designed tasks and tests
- Portfolios of work and work samples

## Behaviour Management

The school recognises that children with Autism may have additional sensory, communication and emotional needs that may result in emotional outbursts occasionally in class. Every effort will be made by the staff of the Special Class and the school as a whole to identify and remove triggers as much as is practically possible and to provide a calm environment for the children with a safe space to allow the children to regulate their behaviour. If undesirable behaviour is persistent and disruptive to the learning of others, a behavioural plan will be created for the child as part of their School Support Plan which focuses on encouraging and incentivising desired behaviour.

All pupils including pupils with special educational needs are subject to the school Code of Behaviour and Health and Safety policy. Where a child's behaviour impacts in a negative way on the other children in the Special Class or another mainstream class to the extent that their constitutional right to an education is being interfered with as judged by the Board of Management of the school, the school reserves the right to advise parents that a more suitable setting should be found for their child.

## Accommodation

The Special Class has been specially adapted to meet the specific needs of the pupils enrolled. The adaptations are ongoing as the pupils or their level of need change. The classroom (known as The Cabin) has an attached Sensory Room with special equipment for sensory regulation. Recently, a ramp has been installed to provide access for pupils with mobility difficulties. The classroom has been adapted to ensure the health and safety of all, see the **Child Safeguard & Risk Assessment** policy.

This policy was presented to the Board on the 23rd of October.

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management of Scoil Mhuire on the

23<sup>rd</sup> Oct 24.

Signature of the Chairperson of the Board of Management

Bl Phil Ryan.

Date: 23/10/24