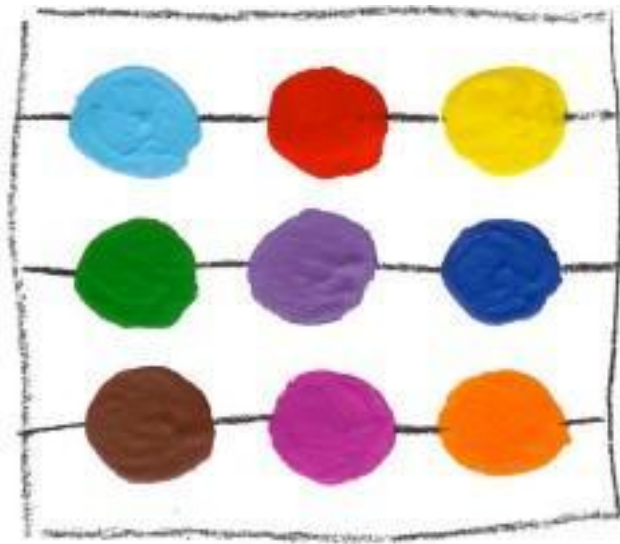


Autism Class Policy



Carrigaline Educate Together National School

This document is intended to provide details of the main policies of Carrigaline Educate Together National School (CETNS). It is intended to help parents and guardians understand the environment and approach of the school. This document is regularly reviewed. All feedback is encouraged and welcome.

Version	Description	Authors
November 2016	First version of policy	Board of Management
September 2017	Amendment to clarify matters in relation to School Support Plus Plan meetings	Board of Management
March 2020	Review of policy	Board of Management
February 2023	Review of Policy	Board of Management

School Contact Details

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Autism Class Policy

Introductory Statement

The policy was formulated having been identified in a Risk Assessment as an area that required clarification. It was devised by members of policy committee and proposed to the Board of Management for approval and ratification. The policy has been formulated in light of a number of background documents, including the *Health & Safety Authority's Code of Practice for Employers and Employees on the Prevention and Resolution of Bullying at Work (2021)* and the *Equality Authority's Code of Practice*, given legal effect in the Statutory Instrument entitled *Employment Equality Act 1998 (Code of Practice) (Harassment) Order 2002 (S.I. No. 78 of 2002)*. All staff were consulted by email in the process of devising this policy.

Rationale

Following advice from the SENO, the decision to provide an Autism Class in Carrigaline Educate Together NS, Kilnagleary, Carrigaline, Co. Cork, was taken by the Board of Management (BoM) of the school in conjunction with the principal, staff and school community in January 2012. This decision was made with a view to providing an appropriate, specialist education within a mainstream setting for children who want to attend our school. The second Autism Class opened in September 2013. The third Autism Class opened in September 2017. Autism Class A caters for children in the senior classes, where possible. Autism Class B caters for children in the middle classes, where possible. Autism Class C caters for children in the junior classes, where possible. The multid denominational, co-educational, child-centred and democratically run principles of Educate Together schools underpin all aspects of school life, including the working of our autism classes.

Vision

We, the staff of Carrigaline Educate Together NS, 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.

Relationship to the Characteristic Spirit of the School

The Classes for Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder Policy reflects the overall ethos of the school which states:

Carrigaline Educate Together N.S. is one of a number of equality-based schools throughout the country. The representative organisation for these schools is 'Educate Together'.

Educate Together aims to meet a growing need in Irish society for schools that recognise the developing diversity of Irish life and the modern need for democratic management structures. In particular, Educate Together guarantees children and parents/guardians of all faiths and none equal respect in the operation and governing of education.

The schools operated by the member associations of Educate Together are fully recognised by the Irish Department of Education and Science and work under the same regulations and funding structures as other national schools. However, they have a distinct ethos or governing spirit. This has been defined in the following terms:

- **Equality-based** i.e. all children having equal rights of access to the school, and children of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds being equally respected
- **Co-educational** and committed to encouraging all children to explore their full range of abilities and opportunities,
- **Child centred** in their approach to education
- **Democratically run** with active participation by parents/guardians in the daily life of the school, whilst positively affirming the professional role of the teachers (*Source: Educate Together Charter*)

Whilst the concepts of child-centeredness and co-educationalism are now widely accepted in Irish primary education, what distinguishes the Educate Together schools is their hard work in developing a culturally inclusive and democratic ethos. This has pioneered unique approaches to inclusion of minority opinions and faiths in the Irish context.

The schools have developed education programmes which open the eyes of children to the naturally positive contribution that social, religious and cultural diversity and difference of viewpoint and opinion make to society.

The other characteristic feature of these schools is that they are democratically organised and governed. This maximises the potential for building a genuine partnership between the professional, objective role of the teacher and the necessarily personal involvement of the parent in contributing to their children's education.

Information taken from the Educate Together website www.educatetogether.ie

C.E.T.N.S. makes the distinction between denominational education and moral/religious education. The ethical curriculum followed by the school is called the Learn Together Curriculum. It is comprised of four strands: Morality & Spirituality, Equality & Justice, Belief systems, Ethics & the environment.

Denominational instruction is facilitated by the school insofar as groups are permitted to use the school premises. This is organised by parents/guardians outside of school hours.

The Autism Class Policy recognises and endeavours to adopt the values that are set out in the ethos of Educate Together. It attempts to support and sustain a harmonious environment in which the potential of all staff is nurtured through the co-operation between staff, pupils, parents/guardians, board members and all other relevant parties.

Aims

The Autism Class Policy aims to:

- 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 ASD 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.

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 Pre-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. Please note all reports in operation on a child should be provided to the school for assessment by the Admission Team (outlined below).

Fulfilment of enrolment criteria does not necessarily ensure admission. Admission may be refused if:

- Necessary resources pertaining to the enrolment are not available
 - Sufficient classroom space is not available
 - The BOM decide that the school is unable to adequately meet the needs of the child
- Taking all of the above into account, the BOM reserves the right of admission and to refuse admission.

Pre-enrolment and enrolment in Autism Classes

Pre-enrolment and enrolment in the Autism Classes:

1. Registration process begins with a referral from the autism team in Sonas/Shine and/or other relevant organisations, or from a telephone call/visit from the parents/guardians. Applications will only be processed on the basis of a valid diagnostic or psychological report of an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (i.e. Childhood Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Asperger's Syndrome, mild Autism, Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified). This must be accompanied by a letter from a psychologist stating that the child requires a special class setting.
2. Details of applicants are retained by the Principal on a waiting list. These details include name, date of application, date of birth, address, telephone numbers, date of diagnosis and person who diagnosed the child.
3. Once this process has been completed the applicant secures a place on the waiting list of applicants to enrol.

Enrolment Criteria for the Classes for Children with Autism

1. The maximum class size is six pupils.
2. If the number of children on the list of applicants to enrol exceeds the number of places available, the following criteria will apply in order of priority;
 - Date of application, provided that a definite diagnosis of Autism has been identified by a qualified professional as set out in the criteria above
 - That the age and class level of the child is appropriate to the space which is available within the class

Admissions Team for Classes for Children with ASD

Each application will be considered by the Admissions Team. The team will include:

- The school Principal – Rory Ward
- Autism Class Coordinator - Bríd Stack

- 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.

Appeals

1. If a decision is communicated by C.E.T.N.S. to a parent indicating that the school is unable to accept their child, that parent/guardian may request a copy of the enrolment policy and enquire as to what section/sections of the policy justify the refusal.
2. If unhappy with the explanation the parent may appeal the decision, in writing, directly to the BOM.
3. The BOM then considers the appeal and advises the parent/guardian, in writing, of its decision.
4. If the parent/guardian is dissatisfied with the outcome, the parent/guardian may then make an appeal to the Secretary General under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998. Appeals must generally be made within 42 calendar days from the date the decision was notified to the parent. This policy document has an appendix that contains prototypes of all the standard letters and forms from the school relating to the enrolment procedure.

All parents/guardians are reminded that it is their responsibility to keep the enrolment officer informed of any change of address or contact numbers. This applies even when there is a sibling enrolled at the school.

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
- Additional Education Teachers 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 Additional Education 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

Mainstream Class Teacher

- Working with the multi-class teacher to identify regular opportunities for integration or reverse integration, where appropriate
- Working with the autism class teacher and ANAs to implement accommodations that the child with ASD may need to be successful in the mainstream classroom, where appropriate
- Providing input, where appropriate, during the review stages of the School Support Plus Plans

Additional 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 multi-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

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 ANAs.

“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.

Approaches to Teaching and Learning

The children will access a curriculum based on the Primary School Curriculum (1999) 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 and Ethical 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 main approaches are as follows, but are not limited to; play, language through play, Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication – Handicapped Children (TEACCH), Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA), Intensive Interaction & Relationship Development, Floortime, Lámh, Language Through Colour and Social Stories.

The assessment tools in use in the autism classes are, but are not limited to; Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills (ABLLS), Verbal Behaviour Milestones Assessment and Placement Programme (VB-MAPP), Psychoeducational Profile – Third Edition (PEP-3), Neale Analysis of Reading Ability II (NARA II) and The Fine Motor Olympics Checklist.

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.

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 of C.E.T.N.S.

All teachers will be expected to complete the following CPD within the first year of teaching in the autism class setting;

- Contemporary Applied Behavioural Analysis (C-ABA) *or* Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication – Handicapped Children (TEACCH)
- An Introduction to ASD (Primary)

A list of other courses available from the NCSE are displayed on the NCSE website.

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.

Equipment and Resources

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.

Children in the autism classes will have access the Sensory Room and the Soft Room when needed.

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.

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

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 March 2023. Amendments will be implemented immediately.

Timetable for Review

This policy is to be reviewed during the school year 2025/2026.

Ratification and Communication

The amended policy will be communicated to members of the Board of Management prior to the meeting of the BOM on 23rd February 2023. Parents will be made aware in the next school communication that the policy is available for viewing by appointment in the school.

Date of ratification:

Signed: _____ *Date:* _____ CHAIRPERSON OF BOM