

Admissions Policy: ASD Class in Scoil Aoife CNS

Introduction

This policy has been drawn up by Principal Stacey McAuley, staff and the Board of Management. Following consultation with other CNS schools currently operating ASD classes, it was discussed at staff level, ratified by management and shared with DDLETB. This policy applies to all applicants to the ASD Class. This policy is subject to review on an annual basis. Scoil Aoife operates an inclusive policy with regard to enrolment and does not favour any particular religion or cultural background. The age range to be considered for enrolment is between 4 and 10 years of age – depending on whether a place becomes available. Scoil Aoife CNS is dependent on grants and teaching resources provided by the DES and this policy shall have regard to these resources and funding.

Scoil Aoife CNS currently has 1 class for pupils with a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The ASD unit is referred to as The Magic Garden and classroom 1 is The Oaks. The children must have a recommendation that they should attend a special class in a mainstream school setting, with an allocation of one teacher and two SNAs. There will be a total of six pupils. The SNAs are assigned to the class and not to individual children.

Currently we have 1 ASD class with 6 pupils, 1 teacher and 2 SNA's.

This policy is set out in accordance with the provision of the Education Act 1998, the Education Welfare Act 2000, the Equal Status Act 2000 and the Disability Act 2002. The Board of Management and school management team trusts that by doing so, parents will be assisted in relation to enrolment. The Principal and the Chairperson of the BOM will be happy to clarify any further matters arising from this policy.

The MAGIC GARDEN in our school caters for pupils with a confirmed diagnosis within the autistic spectrum disorder (ASD).

Background

Scoil Aoife Community National School is a co-educational Primary School which comes under the patronage of Dublin Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board (DDLETB). The school aims to promote the full and harmonious development of all aspects of the child: intellectual, physical, cultural, moral and spiritual. Scoil Aoife CNS seeks to provide a high standard of education where each child is encouraged to reach his/her personal potential. The school is committed to a spirit of inclusion, equality and harmony where each child and member of the school community is valued and treated with respect.

It is the policy of Scoil Aoife CNS to respect, celebrate and recognise diversity in all areas of human life. Children attending Scoil Aoife CNS will be taught and encouraged



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to view diversity as something which reflects the community from which the children are drawn. The school will endeavour to encourage the children committed to its care to have a pride in what makes them different and a belief that difference, when respected and valued, gives strength and vibrancy to the total school community and the wider community in which they live. As part of its ethos, Scoil Aoife CNS welcomes children from all faiths/ beliefs and cultures.

Scoil Aoife CNS was established in September 2014. For the first year the school was located in temporary accommodation in Brookfield, Tallaght. Scoil Aoife CNS was re-located to a new site in Citywest in September 2016. The school presently has 16 mainstream classrooms, a special needs unit and a school hall. This is a developing school and will cater for the full range of Primary classes, from junior infants to sixth class. When fully developed, Scoil Aoife CNS will have capacity to cater for up to 16 mainstream classes and two special classes. Under the patronage of DDLETB, a board of management oversees the smooth running of the school. The board of management is committed to the successful implementation of recent legislation, in particular the Education Act, 1998, the Education Welfare Act 2000 and the equal Status Act 2000. The board of management fully subscribes to the principles of partnership, accountability, transparency, inclusion and respect for diversity, parental choice and equality.

In Scoil Aoife CNS, we expect all children, and all members of the school community, to find our school a safe and welcoming place, where everyone can achieve success, irrespective of their background. It is not possible to accomplish this if any child, or member of the school community, faces prejudice or hostility because of differences of colour, race, ethnicity, nationality, culture, religion/belief or language.

Provision within the ASD class

Scoil Aoife CNS has a purpose built ASD teaching facility. The first class opened in September 2017. The ASD unit has a Sensory Room, 2 classrooms, a para education room, open movement area and toilet facilities, which are purpose built and meet all criteria as set out by the Department of Education and Skills. These classes seek to provide the highest quality of education in collaboration with the external services the children are currently linked in with such as: Daughters of Charity, Beechpark Services, Temple Street Hospital and the Early Intervention Team who provide multi-disciplinary support services consisting of: Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Psychology and Social work.

Type of Special Needs Unit

Following consultation with our Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO), our National Education Psychological Services (NEPS) Psychologist, our BOM, our patron 'Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board' (DDLETB), school staff and parents, it was decided that Scoil Aoife CNS could best facilitate the needs of the

community by opening a Class which would cater for children who have an Autistic spectrum disorder.

Vision for our Special Needs Unit

Scoil Aoife CNS seeks at all times to provide a caring learning environment where each child is welcomed, respected, cherished and facilitated in reaching their full potential whatever their background, ethnicity / nationality or faith/belief.

Our ASD class is an additional support mechanism for pupils with autism who fulfil the criteria for admission into an SNU and who would find attending a mainstream class on a full-time basis challenging. This class will form an integral part of the school community. As far as possible the pupils attending our special needs units are integrated into the day to day activities of the school and on occasion children attending the Magic Garden participate in school related events where the teacher deems appropriate.

One of the aims of our special class is to integrate children with autism into the mainstream school community. Accordingly, children who attend the special class will be integrated into age appropriate mainstream classes. The rate of this integration will be determined by the professional personnel assigned to the class and the principal after consultation with the parents.

Our vision for our special needs class is that children attending will feel secure and happy in school. Our objectives are to give each child an individualised programme of work that focuses in on their strengths and difficulties in relation to communication and social skills within a structured and safe environment, thus enabling them to achieve their full potential and experience a happy and fulfilling school life.

Scoil Aoife Community National School is a learning community where the holistic development of each child is paramount. We envisage that our special classes will be a partnership between children, parents, staff and the various outside agencies that link in with the school and are working on behalf of the children. As such, Scoil Aoife CNS seeks to ensure that all members of the school community work in partnership, having the best interest of pupils at heart and the overall development of the special class.

Mission Statement

Our mission is to provide a special needs class which is welcoming, holistic in its approach, child centred, reflective of current teaching and good practice in relation to pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. This class will seek to create learning opportunities in a setting of diversity and inclusion. It will cater for the physical,

academic, social and emotional needs of children within the school day in a supportive and caring environment.

Our mission is for all pupils attending our ASD class to learn to their full potential in a caring, educational and safe environment.

The Magic Garden aims to:

- Remove/reduce a child's barriers to learning,
- Assist children to develop effective systems of communication and social interaction,
- Develop a child's ability to adapt to, and accommodate change,
- Encourage children to positively manage their own behaviour and difficulties,
- Provide a broad and balanced curriculum that meets each child's needs, including access to the Primary School Curriculum,
- Provide an environment that fosters care and monitors and provides interventions for pupils to enhance learning opportunities,
- Provide inclusive opportunities for children to integrate into mainstream as part of the continuum of education provision,
- Work in partnership with parents/carers and other professionals.

Ethos and Values of our special needs unit

Scoil Aoife CNS seeks to provide an environment within which students feel happy, safe and valued. A positive and supportive approach is adopted in addressing the unique and special needs of each of the students. Emphasis is placed upon building on the child's strengths, thus enabling progression in all aspects of his or her development. Close liaison with parents and relevant outside agencies affords the opportunity to address the needs of the "whole child." Shared aims and objectives between home and school provide the children with clear and consistent guidelines in terms of behavioural codes and the reinforcement of personal and social skills in a variety of settings.

Curriculum

Students attending our special needs class are encouraged to develop a sense of responsibility, self-esteem, self-confidence, self-advocacy and self-discipline. The school plays an active role in promoting these qualities. Through direct intervention and by adult example students are encouraged to develop an awareness and respect for each other, the staff and their surroundings. Pupils are also encouraged to care for their own belongings and respect those of others, to foster appropriate and socially acceptable forms of behaviour and to take pride in their own strengths and achievements. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions and, in the long term, develop a sense of self-discipline. In achieving this aim, each child is supported in developing individual strategies and responses to calmly diffuse or manage potentially difficult situations. From a staff perspective emphasis is placed upon recognising and rewarding positive behaviour.

Individual educational plans and behavioural plans will be put in place for each child. These will be drawn up in consultation with parents and the relevant outside agencies. All behaviour management programmes are discussed with parents and appropriate strategies, which can be followed both at home and in school, are developed. Students generally respond well to the structured environment of the school and it is our aim to manage or modify difficult behaviours. Parents are encouraged to approach the school if they wish to discuss a particular problem. In addition to these plans the school together with parents, will be instrumental in establishing and implementing a code of behaviour for the special needs unit. Students attending the units are treated with dignity and respect and are encouraged to make their own decisions and choices and share ideas and opinions wherever possible.

Approaches to teaching and learning in our SNU

In Scoil Aoife Community National School we believe in an eclectic approach to pupils learning in our ASD class. This is in accordance with the Department of Education and Skills recommendation. The school will be cognisant of current theories and methods of teaching. Pupils with autism generally display significant difficulties within the 'Triad of Impairment' which is at the heart of autism. These impairments relate to:

- difficulties in language and communication,
- social relationships, and
- rigid patterns of behaviour/thought/interests.

These difficulties form major barriers to learning. Our role is to help our pupils to come to terms with, and overcome as far as possible these difficulties.

A modified curriculum will be the guiding education programme with additional emphasis on:

- behavioural management
- the development of adaptive and independence skills
- social and communication skills

In order for the teacher to develop individualised educational plans, a period of observation and baseline assessment will be necessary.

Code of Behaviour

In keeping with the NEWB guidelines, the school has drawn up a code of behaviour for the special class. Included in this code of behaviour is the possibility, in certain extreme cases that a student may be temporarily suspended from school or permanently excluded should their behaviour put the safety and welfare of other students and staff members at risk. All reasonable steps to reduce or prevent such extreme behaviour would be taken prior to considering suspension or expulsion.

Staffing procedures and available places in our ASD class:

In accordance with the regulations as set down by the Department of Education and Skills there are six places available for pupils with ASD who fit the criteria for

placement in our special class. The school will be allocated one teacher and two SNAs to facilitate teaching and learning and meeting the children's care needs. Should a child who is currently attending the class leave the school or should a child be ready to integrate fully into mainstream, places may become available.

Initially any new child attending the class will attend on a phased-in basis and on a reduced day. The organisation of this phased approach will be at the discretion of the principal after consultation with the staff. This is to help children settle into their new environment and familiarise themselves with their surroundings and the other pupils and staff members. It is very important that we try to ensure this initial settling in period will be a positive experience for all involved.

Meeting with parents and children

If a place is offered, meetings will be held with parents and children seeking admission to the special needs unit to discuss the individual needs of the child. Permission will be sought from parents to visit the child's pre-school/ school placement with a view to speaking to staff members about the child's needs, academic / social-development and capabilities. If it is considered from these meetings and conversations that the school can successfully address the child's needs (and the child is capable of meaningful integration both in the special and the mainstream classroom) then the child and family will be invited to the school to become accustomed to the school and meet with staff. The purpose of all these meetings and conversations is:

- to inform the decision as to whether or not the special class in Scoil Aoife CNS is an appropriate placement for the child
- and to facilitate a smooth transition into school if accepted.

Criteria for Enrolment

1. Each child must have a diagnosis of Autism / Autistic Spectrum Disorder using the DSM-IV or ICD 10 criteria as set out by a professional / individual approved by the Department of Education and Skills and a Multi-Disciplinary assessment report. This report must be current (within the last 12 months).
2. A recommendation that a special class placement from a competent professional is best suited to the child's needs must be clearly stated in the child's psychological assessment. See pg. 7 for detailed criteria for admission.
3. As inclusion is an integral part of our school ethos, it is a necessary criterion of enrolment that any child attending the class must be capable of integrating into a mainstream classroom setting. Thus, their level of autism mustn't prevent the child from interacting appropriately and integrating into mainstream. Furthermore the child's cognitive level must allow him/her to integrate academically and socially in the mainstream school setting as well as the ASD class. The level of integration, duration and timing will be decided upon by the principal and staff in consultation with the mainstream teacher, external advice and the parents of the child in question. Information will be shared and discussed with all parties at the IEP meetings.

4. A fully completed application form must be filled in by the parents and any relevant reports must be submitted to the school.
5. The completion of an application form does not constitute an offer of a place.
6. The child must be age appropriate for the SNU class to which they are applying.

If the number of children who satisfy the above criteria (1-6), exceeds the number of places available; the following additional criteria will be used to prioritise children for enrolment. Prioritisation will follow the sequence indicated in the three additional criteria below.

Additional Criteria

1. *Priority is given to brothers and sisters of children currently attending Scoil Aoife CNS (including step-siblings, resident at the same address if they meet the criteria in relation to age and ability to integrate into mainstream)*
2. *Priority is given to current pupils attending mainstream in Scoil Aoife*
3. *Priority will be given to children living in the Tallaght area, Dublin 24.*

All unsuccessful applicants who meet the criteria for enrolment will be placed on a waiting list. Priority on the waiting list will be decided in accordance with the date of application. Families, whose children are on the waiting list for the current school year, must make a new application for the following school year if they wish their child to be considered for a place in that year.

All unsuccessful applicants have a right of appeal under Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 providing the unit has not reached its full capacity.

Application Procedure for the Magic Garden;

Registration for the relevant school year will take place from the first Monday in January following the Winter holidays and will close on the last Friday in January. Any application received outside of these dates will not be considered unless a vacancy occurs. All applications will be responded to in a timely manner.

Enrolment forms are obtainable from the school secretary in Scoil Aoife CNS. Requests for enrolment forms should be made to:

*School Secretary,
The Magic Garden,
Scoil Aoife Community National School,
Citywest Drive
Dublin 24.*

It is the duty of parents/guardians to ensure that, the following documentation accompanies your application:

1. An original Birth Certificate
2. A letter from an appropriate professional stating that this child has a diagnosis as referred to above.
3. Documentation stating that this child's needs would be best served by being enrolled in a special class.

Registration alone does not guarantee a place in the special needs unit. Decisions in relation to applications for enrolment are made by the senior in-school management team and endorsed by the board of management in accordance with the enrolment policy.

Return of Forms of Acceptance

Letters of offer for places in the special class will be made by post. All completed acceptance forms must be returned to the address shown above, within two weeks of the letter of offer.

If the school does not receive this documentation by the nominated closing date, the Management will assume that the place is not being accepted and the place will be offered to the next suitable candidate.

Unsuccessful applicants will be informed.

All unsuccessful applicants have a right of appeal under Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 providing the unit has not reached its full capacity.

Equality of access

No child is refused admission for reasons of religion/ belief, language, gender, social status, ethnicity, or political beliefs & values. However, all children attending the special class must have the potential to integrate into the mainstream setting. It is also a criterion of enrolment that the special class is capable of meeting the child's individual needs in a meaningful way.

This policy is subject to regular review by the Board of Management.

Signed: _____

Mr Ian Murphy
Chairperson of the Board of Management
Stacey McAuley
Principal