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Saint Mary's
Church of Ireland National School
Scoil Mhuire

Enrolment Policy & Application Procedure for Special Classes (Autism)

Rationale:

St. Mary's National School has two special class for children with autism. Our first Special Class was established for the beginning of School Year 2015/16 under the auspices of the Department of Education and Skills, and our second special class was opened in September 2023. The decision was taken with a view to providing specialised educational service in a mainstream setting to children who have been diagnosed with an Autism and who fulfil the enrolment criteria.

St. Mary's National School will cooperate with the National Council for Special Education in the performance by the Council of its functions under the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 relating to the provision of education to children with special educational needs, including in particular by the provision and operation of a special class or classes when requested to do so by the Council.

St. Mary's National School will comply with any direction served on the patron or the board, as the case may be, under section 37A and any direction served on the board under section 67(4B) of the Education Act.

Mission Statement:

We aim to offer a positive meaningful educational experience, which allows the child to develop his / her full learning potential leading to integration into their associated mainstream class. After a period of observation, assessment and interaction with the child, a School Support Plan will be developed for each child in consultation with parents and relevant professionals. This will be reviewed on an ongoing basis and will highlight priority learning needs. These needs will be targeted through the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum.

Our Aim

Our Special Class aims to offer an autism specific learning environment with the goal of integration into a mainstream class.

The Board of Management of St. Mary's N.S. has set out this policy in accordance with the provisions of the Education Act 1998, the Education Welfare Act 2000, the Equal Status ACT 2000, and Education for Persons with Special Needs Act 2004.
The first Special Class was established in 2015, funded and resourced by the Department of Education and Skills. This school policy has regard to the funding, resources, services and space available. The Special Class has a maximum capacity of six pupils.

The second Special Class was established in 2023, funded and resourced by the Department of Education and Youth. This school policy has regard to the funding, resources, services and space available. The Special Class has a maximum capacity of six pupils.

In total, St. Mary's N.S. has the capacity to cater for 12 children with autism.

Enrolment

The Board of Management reserves the right of admission within the terms of this policy. The Board of Management will not, however refuse a child based on any of the nine grounds of discrimination e.g.

1. Ethnicity
2. Disability (Severity of Diagnosis)
3. Traveller status
4. Political beliefs
5. Family or social circumstances.

Criteria for Enrolment in our Special Class (Autism)

Enrolment to the Special Class (Autism) follows the stages and timeframes outlined in the School Enrolment/ Admissions policy and associated documents. The following criteria comprise the additional requirements for enrolment in the Special Class.
The criteria for enrolment in the class are as follows:

1. An Application Form provided by the school must be completed and signed by the parents/guardians on behalf of the child at time of enrolment prior to the expected start date.
2. This form must be accompanied by an original birth certificate,
3. The child must have a professional report (psychological assessment) which satisfies the Board of Management. This assessment should have input from a Clinical Psychologist. This assessment must contain a diagnosis of Autism (DSM IV/V or ICD 10/11) made by a clinical psychologist with input from a multidisciplinary team. Please note all reports currently pertaining to the child must be provided to the school e.g. Occupational Therapist, Speech & Language Therapist, Social Worker, Psychiatrist and Physiotherapist.
4. There should be a recommendation by the professionals in the psychological report that a special class placement in a mainstream school is necessary / suitable/ essential to meet the child's needs,
5. The child has access to or is on a waiting list for specified services as recommended. E.g. OT, Speech Therapist etc.
6. The Applicant Pupil must have attained his/her 4th birthday on/before 25th August of the year in which the child intends to start school. A three-year gap is the preferred maximum allowed between any two children within the special class.
7. Admission to the Special Class is subject to a determination by the Admissions team that the placement is appropriate in all the circumstances.
8. A letter of eligibility from the NCSE confirming that the child is known to them and that the child has the required diagnosis and recommendation for a special class with autism.

Admissions Team:

Each application will be considered by the Admissions Team to ensure that all enrolment criteria is fulfilled. The team will comprise the school Principal, Special Education Teacher and an Enrolment Representative from the Board of Management of the school. The Board of Management may accept or reject any recommendation made by the admissions team.

Allocation of Places:

Each child in the Special Class must have a diagnosis of Autism. Under guidelines from the Department of Education and Skills, the maximum class size is six pupils. The Special Class will be supported by a teacher and a minimum of one Special Needs Assistant.

Places in the class will be allocated in the following order.

Children who meet the criteria and who are:

1. Newly diagnosed and already enrolled in the school, subject to the availability of places
2. Children who would be given priority under the school's Enrolment Policy (Attached)

If, following steps 1-2 above, spaces are still available they will be allocated as per list of applicants to the children who live closest to the school. This will be determined by using the Google maps website.

Allocation of a place in the Special Class (Autism) does not guarantee a place in the mainstream classes for any siblings.

Taking all of the above into account and based on the advice of the enrolment team of the Special Class (Autism) the Board of Management reserves the right of admission.

Procedure for Enrolment:

Where there is a vacancy, an application to enrol a pupil in the Special Class may take place at any time during the school year (with the exception of enrolling for Junior Infants for the coming year). Such vacancies will be filled on a first come first served basis. Where there is a vacancy for a pupil to start Junior Infants in the coming school year, the process of Enrolment for Junior Infants in the Special Class (Autism) in St. Mary's N.S will begin as per our Annual Admissions Notice.

Parents/guardians may express interest in enrolling at any stage, and their information will be held on record until the enrolment process begins.

Once a parent/guardian has made an application to the school for a place in the Special Class on behalf of the child, the Principal will undertake to communicate to the parent/guardian the decision of the Board of Management within 21 days of the application. The communication will normally be by letter.

1. The parents of a child being offered a place will be invited to visit the school to meet with the Principal and/or member of the Special Education Team.
2. The parents may be requested by the school to consent to a visit by the staff to the child's pre-school setting to observe the child.

Discharge Policy:
Discharge from the Special Class (Autism) will usually take place once they have completed eight years of primary education, but no later than the academic year of their thirteenth birthday: however, the NCSE (2024) Guidelines and Circular 0023/2025 state that a review of enrolment should take place at a minimum, once every 12 months, and include a careful examination of the child or young person's response to intervention and progress in achieving targets, as outlined in their Student Support Plan.

Waiting List:
Where the Special Class is oversubscribed, the Admissions to School Act 2018 requires schools to compile a waiting list in accordance with our Admissions/ Enrolment Policy. The school will use this list to fill any vacancies arising during the school year in question only. If the school receives a late application, it will be added to the bottom of the waiting list regardless of whether the child is already enrolled in our mainstream class or are local children.

Right to Appeal:
Parents/Guardians whose child(ren) have been refused enrolment may appeal the decision under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998, by accessing the website of the Department of Education and Skills.

Review:
This enrolment policy will be reviewed in conjunction with the general School Enrolment Policy by the Board of Management and amended as necessary.

Ratification:
This policy was ratified by St. Mary's N.S. Board of Management on 13th Oct 2026

This policy will be reviewed in 2027/28 or sooner if deemed necessary by the Board.

Chairperson, Board of Management: Signed Amy M Kidd Date: 13th Oct '26

Principal: Signed Emer Magee Date: 13th Oct '26