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The Board of Management,
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St. Luke's NS
O'Mahony's Avenue
Montenotte
13648D
Autism Class-
Guidance Policy
August 2025

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Introductory Statement and Rationale:

The decision to provide a Special Class for Autism in St. Luke's NS was taken by the Board of Management, in conjunction with the principal, staff and school community in the school year 2022/23.

The decision was made with a view to providing an appropriate, specialist education within a mainstream setting for children with a diagnosis of Autism and who meet the enrolment criteria. Our first Special Class for Autism opened in August 2023.

This policy was formulated in order to clarify the roles and responsibilities of staff in the provision of this specialised education. In formulating this policy, we consulted the following documents:

- NCSE Guidelines for Setting Up and Organising Special Classes
- NCSE: An Evaluation of Education Provision for Students with Autism in Ireland (2016)

Relationship to Characteristic Spirit of the School:

According to the NCSE,

'Special Classes are part of a continuum of educational provision that enables students with more complex special educational needs to be educated, in smaller class groups, within their local mainstream schools. They offer a supportive learning environment to students who are unable to access the curriculum in a mainstream class, even with support, for most or all of their school day.'

Our decision to open Special Classes for Autism reflects our school aim/mission:

"To enable the child to live a full life as a child and to realise his or her life as a unique individual.

To prepare the child for further education and to cultivate lifelong learning.

To enable the child to develop as a social being through living and co-operating with others and so contribute to the good of society.

St. Luke's School celebrates the uniqueness and importance of every child. We value and encourage self-actualisation, developing a positive self-concept and self-esteem. We look to the holistic development of your child."

Our Special Class for Autism reflects these inclusive and equality-based principles.

Aims of the Policy:

- To outline the roles and responsibilities of the principal, Autism class teachers, 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 Class
- To outline approaches to teaching and learning
- To outline planning and paperwork requirements
- To encourage participation in Autism-specific Continued Professional Development (CPD) in order to enrich teaching and learning in the Special Class
- 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	Autism Class Teacher
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Assume overall responsibility for the development and implementation of this policy in co-operation with the BOM, teachers, parents and children● Staffing arrangements, i.e. SNA supports, teachers, substitutes, bus/taxi escorts● Uphold the Code of Behaviour of the school● Management of the enrolment process● Support teachers to increase their knowledge and skills in the area of Autism	<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● 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● Upholding the Code of Behaviour
Mainstream Class Teacher(s)	SNA's – See also SNA Policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Working with the Autism-class teacher to identify regular opportunities for integration or reverse integration, where appropriate● Working with the Autism-class teacher and SNAs to implement accommodations that the child with Autism may need to be successful in the mainstream classroom, where appropriate● Being aware of children's learning targets during integration and using appropriate strategies and methodologies, as guided by the Autism class teacher● Providing input, where appropriate, during the review stages of the SSPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● 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 behavioural management programmes● Guiding the child through tasks and activities designed by the Autism-class teacher or the mainstream class teacher● Data collection/reporting on progress as determined by the Autism-class teacher or Principal● Preparing materials/resources for the children, under the guidance of the Autism class teacher● Providing input during the review stages of the SSPs and attending SSP review meetings

Classroom Environment:

Children with Autism often experience difficulty with sensory information in the environment. The Autism-specific class should be adapted to provide a calm, consistent environment in order to minimise distractions and support effective learning. Classroom adaptations should reflect the needs of the children.

Staff should engage in a continuous process of reflection and the classroom environment may need to be altered throughout the year to better suit the needs of the children.

Adaptations to the classroom environment should include:

- **Minimal visual information on the walls** - Reduced displays of posters, children's work or other distracting visual information
- **Toys and preferred items in closed cupboards or on high shelves** - Increased motivation to request preferred items appropriately at specific times
- **Minimal use of complex language by staff** - Short, clear and unambiguous instructions. Be conscious of how many key words a child can process and remember.
 - Use of visuals to give instructions when possible
 - One person giving instructions at a time
 - Speak in quiet and calm tones
 - Instructions stated clearly in the positive to tell the child what you want them to do, e.g. 'Hands down' instead of 'No pushing'
 - Extended response-time for verbal instructions before repeating instruction (e.g. 15 seconds)
 - Minimal background chat between staff during instruction
- **Clutter kept to a minimum** - Clear countertops and tables to reduce visual distractions
- **Individual TEACCH workstations for children IF/AS required** –
 - Dividers may be used to reduce visual distractions
 - Use of a visual work system to indicate how many tasks to complete
 - Tasks prepared on left-hand side, finished box on the right
 - Promote skills of independence – staff can supervise children at TEACCH stations but not interact with children or help them with tasks. Tasks should be pre-taught at a teaching table so children are capable of completing independently.
 - Visually structured tasks with clear end point
- **Clear learning areas** - teaching table, group table, play area, etc.
 - Visual information in learning area to indicate behaviours expected there
 - Learning areas labelled to correspond with labels on visual schedules
 - Materials organised with distracting items removed
- **Use of visual schedules**
 - Individualised schedules to indicate WHERE to go, i.e. which learning area to go to, not WHAT to do
 - Schedule structured to reflect learning needs of child, e.g. pictures, words or objects may be used; reduced visual information as necessary
- **Availability and use of sensory resources as needed** - Move n' Sit cushion, theraband, fidget toys, ear defenders, chewy tubes, etc. The use of sensory resources should be discussed with parents, and where possible, with external professionals.
- **Guidelines for staff/visitors** - It may be useful to display guidelines for staff or visitors on the wall of the classroom to ensure a consistent and calm environment is promoted at all times. This should also be included in the sub-pack.

Approaches to Teaching and Learning:

The children will access an education based on the Primary School Curriculum, 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.

Autism-class teachers should incorporate children's interests into lesson content to enrich learning experiences.

Learning should be meaningful so that children continue to make progress with their learning.

Note: The Stay Safe Programme and the RSE programme are compulsory and must be delivered at an appropriately differentiated level each year as part of the school SPHE plan.

Children who have a recommendation for a place in a Special Class for Autism do not necessarily qualify for an exemption from Gaeilge. An exemption must be sought in line with criteria laid out in Circular 0055/2022. 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.

An eclectic approach to teaching methodologies is used within the Special Classes for Autism, that is, a range of approaches shall be employed, based on the individual needs of the children. The main approaches include, but are not limited to: **play-based learning, Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), TEACCH, ABA, Intensive Interaction, Floortime, Lámh, Social Stories, Sensory Integration and Attention Autism.**

Integration (See Also Autism Integration Policy):

Children in the Special Class for Autism should have opportunities to learn alongside their typically developing peers in the mainstream classroom environment as much as is possible.

- The nature of all integration should be determined by the Autism-class teacher based on the strengths and interests of the child, in consultation with the child's parents, the mainstream class teachers and SNAs. All parties must be in agreement with the nature and extent of integration before proceeding.
- Integration should be meaningful for the child, i.e. there should be a clear goal which has been communicated to all staff involved.
- The length of time for which a child is integrated into mainstream is based on the individual needs of each child. Integration periods should be increased as the child meets previous goals. Integration should not be decreased without consulting parents and relevant staff.
- Appropriate supports should be put in place prior to integration into mainstream classes to promote positive and successful experiences for the child, e.g. support or training of mainstream teachers in relation to appropriate approaches (e.g. communication and behaviour management strategies), SNA support, the use of appropriate visuals, environmental adaptations in the mainstream class if necessary.
- Methods for communication between the Autism-class teacher and the mainstream teachers should be agreed, e.g. communication book/chart, planning meetings.
- 'Reverse integration' will be put in place for children where integration in the mainstream setting is not appropriate. The focus of reverse integration will be on social skills and play skills only. • Children will be included in whole-school events as much as possible, e.g. school assemblies, school tours, school performances, sports days, fund-raising activities, swimming lessons, etc. In specific cases, where stated in a child's Behaviour Plan, a child's parents may be asked to attend swimming lessons or outings outside of the school.
- Teachers should be mindful of the number of children integrated into a mainstream class at any one time, i.e. no more than 3 children per class at a time **unless appropriate**. Integration should not disrupt teaching and learning in the mainstream class.

Assessment:

Similar assessment requirements apply in the Special Class for Autism as in mainstream classes. Teachers are required to keep an Assessment Folder with information relating to the learning progress of the students in the curriculum subjects that they are accessing.

There should be an additional focus, however, on children's language and communication, behaviour, social and emotional development, play, leisure skills, sensory differences and independence. The assessment process should constructively link with the individualised planning process.

Assessment strategies used may be similar to those that are employed in mainstream classes, where appropriate, e.g. **Checklists, Observation profiles, Teacher designed tasks and tests, Portfolio of work, work samples**

Autism-specific assessment and profiling tools are available for use in the Special Classes for Autism as required. These tools are useful for setting specific individualised targets for students' SSPs.

Autism-specific assessment tools include:

- Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills (ABLLS)
- Verbal Behaviour Milestones Assessment and Placement Programme (VB-MAPP)
- Psychoeducational Profile-Third Edition (PEP-3)
- AET Progression Framework

Note: Children in 2nd, 4th and 6th class are **not exempt** from Standardised Testing without prior approval from the principal.

Planning For Transition:

Children with Autism often have difficulty dealing with changes in their environment or routine. Autism-class teachers should plan carefully for transitions, in collaboration with the child's parents.

Transitions within the School Day - Daily transitions within the school day should be planned, predictable and calm, as much as possible. Unplanned changes to routines should be communicated calmly using visuals. The following strategies should be used to support transitions:

- Visual schedules or First/Then charts
- Social stories (for introducing new routines, e.g. integration sessions)
- Visual timers or countdown to signal the change
- Clear, unambiguous use of language

Transitioning TO Autism-Specific classes - The following guidelines should be followed to help to prepare a child before transitioning to our Specific Class for Autism:

- Principal and/or Autism-class teacher to meet with the child's parents to discuss strengths, interests, sensory preferences, motivators, etc.
- Autism-class teacher to visit the child's previous setting (e.g. pre-school, crèche, home) to observe the child and liaise with staff in this setting. See sample observation template in **Appendix A**.
- Autism-class teacher to access child's professional reports and previous SSPs where possible.
- Provide the child's parents with a social story to include pictures of the school, the classroom and, where possible, the staff working in the class, the bus/taxi and the bus/taxi escort
- Invite the child and their parents for a visit to the class when other children are not there to allow the child to explore the environment and meet the teacher and SNAs
- The above information should be recorded, stored in the child's file and used to begin the child's individualised planning process
- Provide the parents with a transition schedule to outline the dates and times for which the child will attend for the first 3 weeks of school. The child should be on a full day within one month where possible. This transition schedule should be approved by the principal or the SEN-coordinator before being shared with parents.

Transitioning FROM Autism-Specific classes - The following guidelines should be followed when a child is transferring from our Autism specific class to a new setting:

- The Autism-class teacher should support the parents to schedule a visit to the new setting and to meet the child's new teacher, i.e. help the parents to make contact with the teacher, help parents to schedule a meeting.
- The Autism-class teacher should obtain photos of the new setting where possible in order to create a social story / photo book for the child. Details of new school routines and rules should also be included where possible.
- The Autism-class teacher should provide the new setting with an up-to-date copy of the child's Pupil Profile and SSP, with the parents' permission. This should include information on the child's strengths, interests, current level of performance across curricular areas as well as social and behavioural learning areas. Information regarding effective strategies, resources and methodologies should be included.

Planning Requirements:

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

1. **Individual pupil profile:** The pupil's profile documents their current level of performance across learning areas, e.g. literacy, numeracy, language and communication, behaviour, emotional development, leisure skills, social interaction, play and independence skills. Information on effective teaching methodologies or learning style should also be included. A formal review of this profile should be coordinated by the class teacher for each child in collaboration with his/her parents each October and February.
2. **Student Support Plan (SSP):** Short-term SMART targets are reviewed and updated monthly, and shared with parents. Targets should be realistic so that progress can be observed from month to month. Targets should be included across different learning areas to promote social and emotional well-being, as well as academic learning.
3. **Monthly group plan:** Short-term plan for thematic group activities, e.g. Story time, Maths Topic, SESE, SPHE, Social skills, PE, Arts, etc.
4. **Cuntas Míosúil:** Progress review and evaluation of SSP targets, noting targets achieved; Progress review and reflection on monthly group plan
5. **Monthly Health and Safety Audit:** This should focus on behaviour concerns or medical conditions to ensure school management are informed. See **Appendix B**.

Depending on the needs of the children in the class, the class teacher may also be required to develop the following additional documents:

1. **Behaviour Plan:** This may be required if specific behaviour management strategies and approaches need to be implemented with a child. The plan should be based on behaviour data collected regarding functions of behaviours and potential triggers. Strategies should be shared with all staff who work with a child so that they can be implemented consistently. See template in **Appendix C**.
2. **Intense Behaviour Management Plan:** If /when a child's behaviour is a consistent risk to the teaching and learning of others and/or risk to the health and safety of other pupils/staff, child may be placed on a Safety Specific Behaviour Plan. This plan is drafted in conjunction with NEPS, SENO, staff, parents and BoM and is adapted to individual needs. It contains an emergency plan if/when an incident occurs. See **Appendix D**.
3. **Intimate Care Needs Plan:** This may be required if a child needs specific regular support or assistance with intimate care needs such as toileting. Staff may seek advice or support from external professionals as required. Please refer to the *Intimate Care and Toileting Policy*. Template in **Appendix E**.
4. **Substitute file:** Class teachers should develop a folder of work for substitute teachers to include the following:
 - a. Pupil passport page or one-page summary of pupil needs
 - b. Timetables

- c. One-page summary of strategies and approaches used in the class. This should be laminated and put on display for visitors to the class. See sample in **Appendix F**.
- d. Suitable work or work plans in the event of teacher's absence.

Equipment and Resources:

Individualised Equipment and Resources –

The children in the Specific Class for Autism will have access to equipment and resources which are recommended in their psychological reports, occupational therapy reports and speech and language reports, where possible. Where specific equipment is recommended for a particular child, the professional report may be forwarded to the NCSE for approval for funding. Weighted equipment, e.g. weighted vests, should not be used with a child unless recommended and tailored to the correct weight.

When a recommendation is made for a child to have access to a specific piece of equipment throughout the school day, (e.g. a Move n' Sit cushion, a slant board, chewy tube, PECS book, etc.), the parents of the child may 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.

Shared Resources –

Shared access to equipment and resources (e.g. gross motor equipment, toys, literacy and numeracy resources, sensory equipment, reference books) is available through the use of the shared storage spaces.

Equipment and resources should be replaced in the correct space when not in use for continued ease of access for other members of staff.

Shared Spaces –

Children in the Special Class for Autism will have access to other rooms and spaces in the school – current and future. Use of these areas should be timetabled when possible to promote ease of access for other children and classes. However, there may be occasions when children need unplanned access to these spaces for calming purposes.

Safety is of utmost importance when using these areas and when using specialised equipment. Activities to be carried out in these rooms or using specialised equipment should be planned carefully by the class teacher according to each child's individual needs and sensory preferences. An OT may be consulted where possible. Children's behaviour should be monitored before and after using these rooms or equipment when new activities are introduced.

Access to these shared spaces may be timetabled for children in mainstream classes as required.

Code of Behaviour:

The school Code of Behaviour applies to all children in the school, including the children in the Special Classes 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.

Daily Management of Behaviour – Staff should respond to behaviour misdemeanours calmly, according to the school's positive behaviour management approach. Children should be treated with dignity and respect at all times. Children's behaviours should be redirected subtly and calmly by staff when in public.

Incidences of behaviour misdemeanours should be consistently recorded by the Autism-class staff in an agreed format, e.g. ABC charts, behaviour tracking charts, 5 point scale. Behaviours should be analysed in order to identify the potential triggers or the functions of the behaviour. Serious behaviour misdemeanours should be recorded on the child's file on Aladdin.

If a child displays repeated and consistent negative behaviours, the information from these behaviour charts should be used to develop a behaviour plan, in collaboration and agreement with the parents of the child and supporting services, where possible. A behaviour plan should outline a clear behaviour goal, or 'desired replacement behaviour'. Staff should select appropriate intervention strategies based on the function of the child's behaviour. All staff working with this child should employ these strategies consistently. Please see a sample behaviour plan in **Appendix C**.

Management of Extreme Serious Behaviour Misdemeanours –

Autism-class staff should adapt the Emergency Safety Plan (**Appendix G**) which outlines procedures to be followed in the incidence of an extreme challenging behaviour. The Board of Management advises that the procedures to be followed include:

- Serious incidences of behaviour misdemeanours should be communicated immediately to the principal by calling them on mobile phone.
- Serious incidences of behaviour may include a child's attempts to injure him or herself or attempts to injure another person.
- Where the behaviour of one child escalates to the extent that the safety of children or staff are at risk, all other children should be evacuated from the room.
- Staff are not trained in manual handling in this regard and the Board of Management does not advise the use of this approach. Staff should not attempt to move a child who is experiencing a serious behaviour tantrum or meltdown. Staff should remove any items which the child may use to hurt themselves and supervise the child from a safe distance.
- If a child or staff member is seriously injured, staff should notify the office/secretary immediately and an ambulance or GP will be called, the principal informed and parents/guardians contacted. Staff may administer First Aid if needed in line with the School Health and Safety Statement/Policy.
- If there are less than 2 SNAs present, one should seek help from the SEN team/school management team immediately.

Where a child's behaviour impacts in a negative way on the education or safety of other children in the class, or on the safety of staff, sanctions may be applied as outlined in the school Code of Behaviour.

Confidentiality –

It is important that all pupils and staff are treated with dignity and respect at all times. Issues relating to the behaviours or care needs of **ANY** child should **NOT** be discussed by staff (teachers, SNAs, escorts) outside of the school environment.

Well-Being:

Pupil Well-Being - Children with Autism often experience difficulty recognising, verbalising and expressing their own emotions. As such, the following supports are put into place in the Autism-classes in order to safeguard and foster the well-being of the children who attend:

- **Teaching communication systems:** As appropriate, staff will train children in the use of functional communication systems to help them learn to express their emotions, needs and wants, e.g. PECS (e.g. using PECS book, Proloquo2go or Grace app), Lámh.
- **Communication with parents:** Staff consistently monitor, observe and record the behaviours and moods of the children in the class. If concerns arise as to the wellbeing of one of the children, (e.g.

low moods, poor eating or hygiene behaviours, consistent challenging behaviours), this will be discussed with parents and with available external professionals.

- **Calming activities:** Children will engage in calming activities and sensory regulation activities throughout the day, according to their needs. Children's sensory regulation is regularly monitored.
- **Promote positive relationships:** Children are encouraged and taught to develop positive relationships with one another and with staff through play-based activities, pair/group learning, integration, leisure time, etc.
- **S.P.H.E. curriculum:** Resilience skills and emotional awareness is taught through the S.P.H.E. curriculum. Teachers may employ differentiated strategies, e.g. social stories, sorting and matching tasks, visual communication systems.

Note: Child protection concerns should be reported to the DLP or DDLP, as per school policy.

Staff Well-Being - It is acknowledged that the Autism-class can often be a high-energy, busy environment for staff that work there. 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, to complete observational notes and to plan for the following day. More formal planning meetings should take place as part of Croke Park hours each fortnight.
- **Breaks from the classroom:** If a staff member is hurt or injured in the classroom, they should take a break from the class for a few minutes to go for a short walk, get a cup of tea or speak to the principal. Staff should inform others in the room before leaving.
- **Staff Support System:** Staff members can request meetings with trusted members of staff/leadership team who they can speak to when they are feeling stressed or upset.
- **Counselling and external supports:** See information displayed in Staff room.

Communication with Parents/Guardians:

The staff of St. Luke's NS recognise that the child's parents are the primary educators of the child. In order to promote a successful and positive school experience for the child, it is important that parents are actively involved in the child's education and are regularly informed on what is happening in class. We support communication with parents in the following ways:

- **Communication journal/diary:** Used by parents, teachers and SNA's to inform one another of the child's mood before school and throughout the day, toileting, eating, independence and a short comment when relevant relating to other significant events.
- **Phone calls:** Parents should be phoned in the incidence of more serious behaviours
- **Meetings:** SSP meetings are scheduled twice per year; parent-teacher meetings are scheduled once per year; further meetings are scheduled as required
- **Sharing documents:** Class teachers will print and share copies of monthly targets with parents. Parents will be provided with copies of Pupil Profiles and other relevant documents at SSP meetings.
- **Email:** Parents can contact class teachers by email as required. Class teachers will respond to emails during working hours only.
- **Class blogs/Website:** Teachers share pictures and details of class activities and events on class pages of the school website.

Summer (July) Provisions:

School-Based July Provision Programme is **not** currently provided in our school. Parents are entitled to apply for Home-Based July Provisions through the Department of Education and Skills (DES). Parents must find a suitable teacher to carry out the programme with their child and complete the application forms which are available to download from the DES website at <https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/July-Provision/>

Continued Professional Development:

The BOM of St. Luke's NS will support access to relevant CPD for school staff when appropriate. Specialist training can be accessed via the Special Education Support Service (SESS) and Middletown Centre for Autism. In-school training from previously trained staff is also encouraged.

Teachers who are interested in working in or are assigned the Special Class for Autism are expected to engage with some training and personal learning prior to placement in the class.

Staff who are working in the class should discuss and identify their learning needs in consultation with school management at least once per term and seek training opportunities. Where possible, in-school training workshops will be organised and made available to all staff, i.e. teachers and SNAs in mainstream as well as in the Special Classes.

The following SESS courses should be prioritised when making applications:

- TEACCH Autism Programme
- Accessing the curriculum for students with Autism
- Contemporary Applied Behaviour Analysis (C-ABA)
- An Introduction to Autism (Primary)

A list of all courses available from the SESS is available on the SESS website:

<https://www.sess.ie/sess-primary-courses>

Staff should request permission from the principal before applying for a course.

Success Criteria:

This policy will be seen to be working well when:

- We receive positive feedback from staff members and parents
- All staff are made aware of and are committed to the principals that are outlined in this policy
- A quality, positive educational service is provided to all children attending Autism Class.
- All efforts are made to ensure the integration and inclusion of children in the Specific Class for Autism within the whole school context, with due regard for the level of needs of the child, available resources and suitability for integration.

Implementation:

This Policy will come into effect from **August 2023**.

Review:

The policy will be reviewed and amended as necessary. The SEN co-ordinator will initiate and co-ordinate this review.

Ratification and Communication:

This policy has been ratified by the Board of management in **July 2023**. The policy will be emailed to parents and staff and made available to all staff and parents on our school website.

Signed: _____

Chairperson BOM

Signed: _____

Principal

30/9/23