



Admissions Policy for St. Stephen's Autism Class

Introduction

This admissions policy is set out in accordance with the provisions of the Education Act (1988) and the Education (Admissions to Schools) Act 2018. The Board of Management of St. Stephen's BNS trusts that by so doing parents and staff will be assisted in relation to enrolment/admissions matters. The Chairperson of the Board of Management, Br Patrick McCallig and the Principal, Ms Sinead Lowe, St. Stephen's BNS, will be happy to clarify any further matters arising from the Policy.

St. Stephen's BNS operates under the Rules for National Schools, The Education Act (1998), The Education (Admissions to Schools) Act 2018, The Education Welfare Act (2000), enacted sections of The Education of Persons with Special Education Needs Act (2004), The Disabilities Act (2002), all relevant equality legislation and Department of Education (DE) Circulars.

School Name: St. Stephen's BNS

School Roll No.: 15046I

School Address: 25 Patrick Street, Waterford.

Telephone No.: 051 871716

Email: ststephensbns@gmail.com

Ethos: Catholic

Patron: Bishop Alphonsus

School Designation: DEIS₁ Urban

Total No. of Teachers: 31

Classes Taught: Junior Infants-6th Class Vertical

Gender Orientation of School: Male only

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The school follows the curricular programmes prescribed by the Department of Education and Skills which may be amended from time to time, in accordance with Sections 9 and 30 of the Education Act (1998).

A Special Class catering for pupils diagnosed with Autism (DSM V or ICD 10) was proposed by our SENO Mary Jowett in 2020 and again in 2021. Due to building works and lack of space the BOM rejected the proposal but made it clear that they were open to the idea. Due to a growing level of need in the school the Board of Management of St. Stephen's BNS applied to open a Special Class for Autistic children. The Autism Class was sanctioned by SENO Selina Lyng on 23/03/2023 and approved by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to open for the school year 2023/2024. A second class for Autistic children was also sanctioned on 23/03/2023 to open for the 2024/2025 school year. The establishment of the second Autism Class is contingent on approval for additional accommodation being granted by the Department of Education Public Buildings Unit and also on the necessary funding and resources being furnished to St. Stephen's BNS by the Department of Education and Skills. This School Policy has regard to and is contingent on the funding, resources, services and space available to our school in the future.

Aims

Our aim is to provide a quality driven, appropriate educational service to all children in the Autism class, within the requirements of all recent legislation pertaining to Special Needs Education.

We aim to strive towards the inclusion of children in the class into mainstream education, having regard for levels of disability, available resources and suitability for such inclusion.

Objectives

1. To provide the optimum learning environment for autistic children, which is safe, visual, structured, predictable, encouraging, stimulating, interesting, challenging and fun.
2. To develop the child's self-esteem.
3. To improve the child's social skills in so far as appropriate.
4. To improve the child's level of independence in social situations.
5. To help the child develop better organisational skills and thereby prepare them for and support them in the transition between primary and secondary schools.
6. To improve their understanding and use of oral and written language.
7. To help them to develop more effective communication skills.

8. To include each child into their peer class in St. Stephen's BNS in so far as appropriate.
9. To foster close links between home and school. The success of the special class depends on parents and staff planning and working together. This will enable the development of realistic expectations and agreed goals for each individual child.

General Information

- i. The Board of Management provides a class for autistic children in accordance with the Department of Education and Skills guidelines and support structures. It is committed to providing the highest quality of education for the children concerned. A Multi-Disciplinary approach is recommended by the Department of Health in collaboration with the Department of Education to support these classes and continued financial support from DE.
- ii. **The number of admissions depends on the number of places available, which may vary from year to year.**
- iii. The curriculum is tailored for individual needs and works towards the mainstream primary education.
- iv. Teaching methods may include elements of various styles and techniques. An eclectic model is employed to meet the unique strengths and needs of the pupils. A visual and structured teaching approach is employed in order to provide a framework for the pupils to engage and learn. This approach which adheres to the principles of the T.E.A.C.H. Programme, is combined with other evidence-based approaches and strategies in order to meet the individual language and communication, social and emotional and behavioural needs of all pupils e.g.:
 1. Communication cards/boards
 2. Symbols, visual timetables
 3. Social stories – group and individual
 4. Functional behaviour assessments (ABA) and IBPs
 5. Specific (individual) paired and group social skills.
 6. Personal pupil plans will be implemented and reviewed regularly with parent/guardian input and specialist recommendations.

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- v. The aim is to include all pupils within the main body of the school whenever possible.

Taking into account the Department regulations and programmes, the rights of the patron as set out in the Education Act, and the funding available, the school supports the principles of;

- Inclusiveness, particularly with reference to the enrolment of children with a disability or other special education need.
- Equality of access and participation in the school.
- Respect for the diversity of values and beliefs.
- Traditions, languages and ways of life in society.
- Parental choice in relation to enrolment.

The Board of Management will not refuse a child on the basis of ethnicity, disability, traveller status, refugee status, political beliefs or family or social circumstances, provided they fulfil the enrolment criteria. Fulfilling the enrolment criteria does not necessarily ensure enrolment if;

- A. Necessary resources pertaining to the enrolment are not available
- B. Sufficient classroom space is not available.
- C. The Admissions Team decide that the school is unable to adequately meet the needs of the child.

Taking all of the above into account, and based on the advice of the Admissions Team of the Autism Class, the Board of Management reserves the right of admission.

Health Service Executive Input

Essential services may be provided by the Health Service Executive. These services include Speech and Language Therapy and Occupational Therapy. St. Stephen's BNS has no control over these services, merely acting as a relevant setting for their provision. All queries about these services must be addressed to the Health Service Executive and not St. Stephen's BNS.

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Home School Links

The role of parents in their child's education is recognised and valued. Every effort is therefore made to maintain effective communications with parents via frequent parent-teacher/parent-therapist meetings and the Log Book system of communication.

We also encourage parents to meet jointly with the class teacher and speech and language therapist. We request that parents ring or email the school to arrange a suitable time for meetings.

Application and Enrolment Procedure

Section A: Pre-Enrolment Procedure:

- 1 Registration process begins with a referral to an Autism Class from the SENO (Special Education Needs Officer), and/or contact from the parents.
- 2 A school enrolment application form, incorporating an application to enrol in the Autism Class, is then completed.
- 3 This application must be accompanied by an up to date educational psychological assessment which confirms the diagnosis of Autism in line with current Department of Education and Skills criteria (up-to-date is considered to be within the previous 1 to 2 years).
- 4 The diagnosis of Autism must be in line with DSM-V / ICD-10.
- 5 A recommendation that a special class attached to a mainstream school is the most appropriate educational placement for the child in light of his complex needs
(Note, a recommendation for '*either* mainstream with supports *or* a special class attached to a mainstream school' will not meet DES criteria for enrolment in a special class).
- 6 A pupil must have a recent report (not older than 2 years) from a relevant professional or team of professionals (for example, psychologist, SLT, psychiatrist) stating that:
 - (i) The pupil has a diagnosis (in line with the designation of the special class in question); and
 - (ii) He has complex or severe learning needs that require the support of a special class setting and the reasons why this is the case.

The professional report must state that the specific needs of the pupil are severe or complex (i.e. using these precise words), give a description of these needs, recommend that a special class is the most appropriate educational placement for the pupil in light of the severe or complex needs (and in line with parental choice) and give reasons as to why this is the case.'

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- 7 Applications must be accompanied by an original birth certificate. Date of application, date of birth, address and telephone numbers must be entered in the applications file.
- 8 Enrolment Application Forms for 2023/24 school year will be accepted from 24th April 2023. The closing date and time for the submission of enrolment applications is 2:40pm on Friday May 5th 2023 (subsequent years to be confirmed).
- 9 All applications received on or before this date will be acknowledged within 2 weeks of the closing day for the submission of applications.

The list of applicants will be reviewed by the Admissions Team, which will consist of the Principal, the Deputy Principal and an Autism Class Teacher. The Admissions Team will be reviewed every two years. In particular the Autism Class Teacher placed on the Team will be reviewed in line with ongoing changing roles within the wider school staff.

The Admissions Team will make a recommendation on each application to the Board of Management. The Board has the right to endorse or overrule any decision made by the Admissions Team.

Enrolment Criteria to be taken into consideration by the Admissions Team are laid out in the following section.

Section B Enrolment Criteria:

The maximum class size is six pupils. Subject to sufficient places being made available in the Autism class, the criteria for enrolment to the Autism class, incorporating the Department of Education and the Health Service Executive (HSE) policies, are as follows:

1. The Enrolment Application Form provided by the school must be fully completed by the parents/guardians on behalf of the child.
2. The enrolment Application Form must be accompanied by an original Birth Certificate.
3. All reports in existence on a child must be provided to the school for assessment by the Admissions Team. These will be treated with the utmost

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confidentiality and only shared with professionals on a need to know basis. The withholding of reports from the school Admissions Team will invalidate an Enrolment Application. A recent psychological or psychiatric assessment is mandatory. A report from a member of a multi-disciplinary team should also be provided. A multi-disciplinary team may consist of a Clinical Psychologist, Occupational Therapist, Speech & Language Therapist, Social Worker and a Physiotherapist.

4. Please note applications will only be accepted on the basis of a psychological report with a primary diagnosis of Autism, provided by a qualified professional, within the last two years. **A child must have a primary diagnosis of Autism made using the DSM-V or ICD 10 by a psychologist or psychiatrist. See points 3 to 6 in section a above.**
5. As inclusion is an integral part of our school ethos, it is a necessary criterion of enrolment that any child attending the Autism class will have his placement reviewed on an ongoing basis. If a child, attending an Autism Class, shows little if any potential for some future inclusion into the mainstream class setting, the suitability of the placement will be reviewed with a view to a potential recommendation that the placement is no longer suitable for the pupil. The level of inclusion, duration and timing will be decided upon by the principal and the staff of Autism Class in consultation with the mainstream teacher, parents of the child in question and on the basis of information shared at an annual review meeting.
6. The parents of the child must accept and agree to the terms of the school's Code of Behaviour and other relevant policies.
7. The Admissions Team may request further information or may request parents/guardians consent to a visit by the staff to a preschool/school/home setting to observe the child.
8. The school acknowledges that all children with Autism present with differing profiles. For this reason, all applications must be considered individually. The receipt of the enrolment application forms, psychological/professional reports and written recommendation is not a guarantee of enrolment.

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9. Once the committee is satisfied that the child presents as fulfilling the above criteria and that a place is available, a place will be offered.

Return of Forms of Acceptance.

Letters of offer of places in an Autism class will be sent by May 22nd 2023. The letter of offer includes an Acceptance Form which must be returned within **7 school days** of the letter of offer being issued by the school. Acceptance into an Autism Class is contingent upon a signed acceptance of the school policies including the School Code of Behaviour in accordance with Section 24(4) of the Education Welfare Act, 2000. If the school does not receive the acceptance form with the required time period, the place will be offered to the next child on the waiting list for that school year.

Applications for places in an Autism class made after **2:40pm on May 5th 2023** cannot be considered for the new school year 2023/24 if all places are filled for this school year.

11. In the event that the number of children that apply for a place (and qualify as per the criteria above) is greater than the number of places available (which depends on the number of places available in the year of application) such places will be filled on review of Enrolment Applications received in the following order of priority.

A. Boys already enrolled in St. Stephen's BNS

B. If the child has siblings currently attending St. Stephen's BNS (including stepsiblings, resident at the same address) if they meet the criteria in relation to age and ability to integrate into mainstream).

C. Sons of staff members

D. Sons of past pupils or brothers of past pupil

E. First come first served

In allocating places, the Admissions Team will consider the readiness of the child, the suitability of placement and age appropriateness of the child.

12. Please note that fulfilling the enrolment criteria does not necessarily ensure enrolment if sufficient places are not available and/or sufficient classroom space and/or resources are not available.

13. The school reserves the right to refuse enrolment/admission to any student where the student has special needs such that even with additional resources available from the Department of Education & Skills and the Department of Health, the school cannot meet such needs and/or provide the student with an appropriate education.

14. ***N.B. If the school does not receive the required documentation with the Enrolment Application form, the application will not be processed or considered***

by the school. It is the responsibility of the Parent(s)/Guardian(s) to ensure that all supporting documentation is correct and is received by the school.

15. All unsuccessful applicants have a right of appeal under Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 within 42 days from the date of the decision by the Board of Management.

16. In the event that the school is oversubscribed, a list, based on the criteria outlined in **section B 11** above, will be maintained for **the current year of application only**. If a place becomes available during the period of this admission statement's existence the place will be offered to the next qualifying pupil on such a list.

17. In the event that a list, as outlined in **paragraph 16** above, is maintained, the school will notify each applicant of their place on the list.

Transfers

The school may request other relevant documentation if a pupil is transferring from another school. All documents need to be received in order for the application to be deemed fully completed.

The Board of Management of St. Stephen's BNS respects the rights of the existing school community and the children already enrolled.

This consideration is paramount when assessing any entry to Autism Classes.

Section C Appeals:

The Board of Management of St. Stephen's BNS, in compliance with section 19(3) of the Education Welfare Act 2000, will make a decision in writing in respect of an application for enrolment within 21 days of the closing date for the receipt of enrolment applications and will inform the parents/guardians in writing of that decision.

Parents will be informed of their entitlement to appeal a decision of the Board of Management in relation to a refusal to enrol in the letter issued 21 days after the closing date for receipt of applications. (Please note the address at which the applicant resides will be the address used by the school for correspondence regarding enrolment).

If the Board of Management refuses to enrol a child, the parents/guardians of the child may appeal the decision at local level. The appeal must be submitted within 10 school days of the date of refusal to enrol. It must be made in writing, addressed to the Chairperson of the Board of Management and clearly state the grounds for appeal. The Board of Management will respond within 10 school days of the receipt of such an appeal.

If following the conclusion of the appeal procedures at school level, a parent/guardian is dissatisfied with the decision made, the parent/guardian has a statutory entitlement under section 29 of the Education Act (as amended by Section 4 of the Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2007), to appeal that decision to the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Skills. It should be noted that such an appeal must be lodged within 42 days of the school's refusal to enrol.

Details on appealing decisions on enrolment under Section 29 of the Education Act (as amended by Section 4 of the Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2007), are available on the Department of Education and Skills website www.education.ie **Section**

D Post Acceptance:

Once a parent/guardian has accepted a place in an Autism Class, the Principal will communicate with the parent/guardian as follows:

1. The parents of a child being offered a place in an Autism class will be invited to visit the school to meet with a member of the Special Ed. Team and the Principal of the School.
2. An information evening may be organised subsequently if necessary.
3. The parents/guardians may be requested by the school to consent to a visit by the staff to a child's pre-school/school/home setting to observe the child.

4. The parents/guardians will be invited on another occasion to come with their child to the class to meet with staff and see the classroom.
5. The first year will see the implementation of the child's personal pupil plan. Ongoing assessment and regular review will determine whether the child's placement is appropriate.
6. The plan will be updated on a regular basis by the staff.
7. The S.E.N.O (Special Education Needs Officer) will also be made aware of the plan.
8. The children may be phased in gradually to the special class through a mutually agreed process between the school and the parents of the child. It is important that every child gets the best possible start in the class. In order to achieve this, the duration of the child's day or school starting date may vary depending on the needs of the child.
9. Each child in an Autism Class will be assigned to an age appropriate mainstream class for inclusion purposes.

Parents of children in the Autism Classes will be expected to liaise with the HSE for essential services based on the children's needs e.g. Speech and Language and Occupational Therapy if they have not already done so.

Monitoring and Review

Section E Placement Review:

The school reserves the right to review the child's progress from time to time whether during or after each year to recommend whether this is indeed an appropriate school placement for your child.

Occasionally, concerns regarding the suitability of a child's continued attendance at the school may arise. In such circumstances, a review of the school's ability to continue to meet the child's needs and safety and to meet the safety of others may be necessary. Any such review will be undertaken by the Admissions Team in consultation with the Board of Management. Any decision will be made in conjunction with the Principal and other relevant staff members.

Parents/guardians will be kept informed of any concerns that might arise in relation to their child's continued attendance at the school at the earliest opportunity. Parents/guardians will also be given an opportunity to engage in the discussion surrounding the placement and concerns that arise from the child's placement itself. In the event that it is determined that the child is not suitably placed in the school, having regard for the realistic service options available at the time, the BOM may request a multi-disciplinary team assessment be carried out to determine the best options for the specific child.

General Discharge policy

Discharge may be recommended if the Admissions Team, after consultation with the parents/guardian, feel that the placement is not appropriate. Discharge from the unit may also happen if a pupil is fully included into mainstream school.

It is school policy that once a child has completed 6th Class they will be discharged from the Autism Class.

Behaviour Review

While some children with special educational needs may display difficult, defiant, or oppositional behaviours, all efforts will be made by the school to manage such behaviour using various strategies and through the implementation of the child's personal pupil plan. With supports and assistance pupils will be expected to learn skills to enable them to follow rules relevant to the School Code of Behaviour. All pupils including special

needs pupils and non-special needs pupils are subject to the School Code of Behaviour and Health and Safety Statement.

While recognising the right of the parents to enrol their child in the school of their choice, the Board of Management of St. Stephen's BNS is also responsible to respect the right of the existing school pupils. This requires balanced judgements, which are guided by the principles of natural justice and acting in the best interest of all children.

In the case of some applicants, to facilitate the child's access to the curriculum or to the building or to transport, it may be necessary to provide specific additional resources to that which are already available in the school (e.g. staff/accommodation/equipment/environmental adaptations or other supports may be required). In such instances it may be necessary to delay a child's starting date in the school to ensure that all essential supports are in place beforehand.

It is understood that pupils may not have the skills to meet the expectations of the Code of Behaviour. It is with this in mind that skills will be taught and practised and so facilitate the child's inclusion (with ongoing supports if necessary).

Where a child's behaviour impacts in a negative way on the other children in the Autism 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.

General

It is the responsibility of the parents/guardians to liaise with the Department of Education and Skills regarding suitable transport for their child to and from school. This needs to be arranged in advance of admission, if required.

Evaluation

The Board of Management will monitor the implementation of all aspects of this policy. This policy may be amended and updated as required.

Children attending the Autism class in the school will be expected to follow the Code of Behaviour.

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management of St. Stephen's BNS following distance consultation on Friday April 20th 2023.

Signed: _____,
Br Patrick McCallig Chairperson

Date: _____

Review date: April 2024

Section F: Following Enrolment-

Further to Enrolment, the following general points are relevant to your child's enrolment.

General Points

Absences

Parents/Guardians are asked to use Aladdin to explain absences. If a child needs to leave early parents must follow the Sign-Out procedure as outlined in the School Code of Behaviour Policy.

When you want to speak to a teacher.

We realise that it may be difficult for some parents/guardians to get to St. Stephen's BNS. Please remember that you are always welcome. **It is impossible, however, for teachers or other staff members to talk to parents if they arrive unexpectedly. Please ring and make an appointment to see your son's teacher.**

Information we need.

In order for us to be entrusted with the care of your child we require the following information:

1. Emergency contact numbers and procedures.
2. Likes and dislikes.
3. Medical needs.
4. Hygiene needs.
5. Family members and
6. Extended family and friends. This list is not exhaustive.

Changes in family circumstances e.g. separation, the arrival of a new baby, moving home, the death of a grandparent etc., can have an effect on your child. We strongly advise that you notify the class teacher of any such changes.

Dress/Clothing/Belongings.

It is expected that your child will wear the school tracksuit. A large part of our school programme for your child is building up his independence. We want your son to be able to manage and look after his own clothing and belongings. You can help us by:

1. Choosing clothes and shoes that make life easier for your child. (Buttons, zips and laces sometimes cause problems). Velcro runners and elastic waistbands are simplest.
2. Tracksuits are a must for Physical Education (P.E.) and swimming days. (Swimming lessons are on the P.E. programme for pupils between 1st and 6th class). In the case of a pupil attending an Autism Class a decision on whether it is possible to include a pupil will be made jointly by staff, parents and relevant professionals.
3. Togs, hat and towel are needed for swimming.
4. Put your child's name on everything that is worn to school.
5. Keeping a change of clothes in the school for your child is an available option.

Illness:

Every child's health is important to us. In order to ensure the highest standard of medical care, the following have been agreed:

1. Home is the best place for a sick child.
2. Wounds should be properly dressed.
3. Please notify us of any medication that your child may be taking.
4. As a rule, teachers are unable to administer medication. Please contact the Principal for arrangements and to discuss the Administration of Medicines Policy.
5. Never send medication to school with your child. It should always be handed from adult to adult.

Healthy Lunch Policy:

While respecting the dietary difficulties faced by many of our children, we encourage healthy, balanced diets. Suitable snacks include fruits, yoghurts, crackers, cheese and sandwiches. Please inform the school if your child has a special dietary requirement or any food allergies. We have a Healthy Lunch Policy available in school. We have a Lunch Club whereby every child is provided with a free hot lunch. The company who holds the current contract is Fresh Today. On enrolment and if your child's dietary requirements allow, you choose your child's menu online each week.

Further information on this scheme will be available from the school office. As pupils in Autism Classes often present with dietary and/or food sensory issues cooperation from all parents is essential when it comes to procedures around food in the Autism classroom.

Information and Communication Technology

All the children have access to iPads whether in an Autism class or Mainstream classroom or SET room. The staff will also consider the need for assistive technology if it arises and if resources allow. Any allocation of assistive technology is dependent on a recommendation from your child's attending psychologist/psychiatrist or other health professional. Applications for assistive technology are decided on by the Department of Education/National Council for Special Education.

Inclusion of pupils from an AUTISM Class into Mainstream Classes

The amount of inclusion/reverse inclusion that each child receives in St. Stephen's BNS is collectively decided upon by those professionals who deal with the child each day i.e. teachers (both special education teachers and mainstream), the Principal and support staff. The view of other interested parties such as Psychologists, Speech Therapists and Occupational Therapists will be taken into account. However, the staff's decision is final. The school promotes a policy of inclusion with age appropriate peers on a social level and ability appropriate, on a curriculum level. Inclusion and its level are based on what is successful for the pupil at his level. It must be appropriate to his needs, productive in teaching and learning and success based. The policy is open to review at all times.

Early levels of inclusion into mainstream will focus on fostering social inclusion. With support the child in an Autism Class will be encouraged to partake in mainstream general class learning with the initial focus on the following:

1. Entering the class without trepidation.
2. Sitting down at a designated table.
3. Tolerating the noise level and pace of a mainstream class
4. Interacting on a social level with the child (children) nearest them.
5. Having lunch with the whole class.
6. Engaging in a "buddy system" at playtime.
7. Acting on general teacher instructions within the classroom setting.

Points 1 to 7 will happen with SNA support if necessary.

Curricular Integration

Having managed successfully at a social level the pupil from an Autism Class will, on a phased basis, be introduced to areas of the curriculum appropriate to his ability level. Inclusion into this class will continue up through his time in the school.

Whilst Physical Education, as with all other curricular areas, is an area open to inclusion, the child is included into the class that best suits his physical condition. This includes coaching from outside agencies and timetables sessions in the school hall.

Where possible the children from an Autism Class will also be fully included in the school sports day.

The level of inclusion into a mainstream class for a core curriculum subject will be on an individual basis only and will differ from child to child. The school will retain discretion as to the particular children who should avail of core curriculum mainstream inclusion.

Staff Development

Opportunities for on-going staff development through in-service courses, NCSE input etc. will be encouraged and availed of by both teachers and assistants. Currently such professional development takes place during the school year. This will mean that on occasion staff in an Autism Class will be away at training. In such cases as far as is possible a Support Teacher will take the Autism Class and a Substitute Teacher will be employed to teach the Support Teacher's caseload.