

Policy for the Autism Classes

Version	Date First Ratified/Amended by BOM	Date Reviewed by BOM
V1.0	27.04.23	

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

Introductory Statement

The policy has been formulated in light of a number of background documents, including the *Health & Safety Authority's Code of Practice for Employers and Employees on the Prevention and Resolution of Bullying at Work (2007)* and the *Equality Authority's Code of Practice*, given legal effect in the Statutory Instrument entitled *Employment Equality Act 1998 (Code of Practice) (Harassment) Order 2002 (S.I. No. 78 of 2002)*. All staff were consulted by email in the process of devising this policy.

Rationale and Relationship to the Characteristic Spirit of the School

The first autism class was opened in 2021 with a view to providing an appropriate, specialist education within a mainstream setting for children who want to attend our school. The second autism class opened in September 2022. The multi-denominational, co-educational, child-centered and democratically run principles of Educate Together schools underpin all aspects of school life, including the working of our special classes.

The Autism Class Policy reflects the overall ethos of the school which states:

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

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

Vision

We, the staff of CETNS, aim to offer a positive, meaningful educational experience which allows the child to develop to their full learning potential in an environment that offers clarity, predictability, understanding and safety.

Aims

The Autism Class Policy aims to:

- Promote the use of positive language
- Identify the criteria for pre-enrolment and explain the procedure for enrolment to the Special Class
- Outline the key roles and responsibilities of the Principal, class teacher, mainstream teacher, and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)
- Explain approaches to integration and inclusion for the children in the Special Class
- Describe approaches to teaching and learning
- Encourage participation in autism-specific Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in order to enrich teaching in the Special Classes
- Explain the role of outside agencies
- Outline the equipment, material and resources used within the Special Classes

Positive Language

The chosen name for our autism classes is Le Chéile. We also use the teacher's name when referring to a specific class which is in line with other classes in the school. We do not use the term 'autism unit' and use positive, inclusive language.

We respect the wishes of parents in deciding if they would prefer identity-first or person-first language when discussing their child. Some people prefer "autistic" while others prefer "with autism." As a school, we have decided to use identity-first language i.e. autistic child or autistic person.

Where young neurotypical children have questions about the personality and/or behaviours of a child on the autistic spectrum we answer those questions in a matter-of-fact, positive way. Often, practical differences are explained. Sometimes, depending on the age of the children it may be appropriate to use the word "autism" if that would help avoid misunderstandings.

Criteria for Pre-Enrolment

Children must have a diagnosis of Autism made using the DSM-V or ICD 10 and a letter from a psychologist stating that the child requires a special class setting. A recent (no more than 2 years old)

psychological assessment or a report from a multi-disciplinary team should be provided. A multi-disciplinary team may consist of a Clinical Psychologist, Occupational Therapist, Speech & Language Therapist, Social Worker and a Physiotherapist. Please note all reports in operation on a child should be provided to the school for assessment by the Admission Team (outlined below).

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

- Necessary resources pertaining to the enrolment are not available
- Sufficient classroom space is not available
- The Board of Management decide that the school is unable to adequately meet the needs of the child

Taking all of the above into account, the Board of Management reserves the right of admission and to refuse admission.

Pre-enrolment and enrolment in the Classes for Children with ASD

The process is set out in our Admissions Policy which is available on our school website.

Discharge from the Classes for Children with Autism

It is school policy to facilitate the discharge of pupils from Le Chéile once they have completed 6th class or have turned 14 years of age before the first day of the first term of the new school year.

Discharge for the purposes of full integration into the mainstream class may also be recommended at the end of any given school year, following consultation with the parents/guardians.

Key Roles and Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of the principal includes;

- Assume overall responsibility for the development and implementation of the policy in co-operation with the Board of Management, Teachers, parents and children
- Monitor the implementation of the policy on an ongoing basis
- Keep relevant teachers informed about the external assessment services that are available and the procedure to be followed in relation to referrals
- Support teachers to increase their knowledge and skills in the area of autism
- Being a member of the admissions team
- Upholding the Code of Behaviour of the school, where appropriate
- Ensure that all staff have received the appropriate training in relation to Child Safeguarding.

The roles and responsibilities of the class teachers in Le Chéile includes;

- Being the main point of contact for the child's parents/guardians
- Involving parents in the educational process, eg. School Support Plans, Home-School Communication Diaries, etc.
- Preparing a new pupil's SSP in consultation with parents, and in liaison with other staff working with the child
- Initiating a review of that SSP each term and organising venue, date and time to consult with parents, mainstream class teacher and SNAs
- Planning and implementing educational provision for children enrolled in the autism class. SSPs being used as long-term planning and fortnightly plans for short-term planning to enable progression over time
- Co-ordinating the supporting work of the Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) on an ongoing basis
- Working with the mainstream class teacher to identify regular opportunities for integration or reverse integration, where appropriate
- Communication of all information from the SSP meetings with the class teacher
- Working with the mainstream class teacher to identify and implement accommodations that the child may need to be successful in the mainstream classroom, where appropriate
- Upholding the Code of Behaviour of the school, where appropriate
- Ensure that all staff have received the appropriate training in relation to Child Safeguarding.

The roles and responsibilities of the mainstream class teacher include;

- All children enrolled in Le Chéile are dual enrolled i.e. they have a place in the autism class and in their respective mainstream class. Where children are integrated for particular curricular areas the responsibility for assessment and differentiation lies with the mainstream class teacher.
- Working with the teacher to identify regular opportunities for integration or reverse integration, where appropriate
- Working with the teacher and SNAs to implement accommodations that the child with ASD may need to be successful in the mainstream classroom, where appropriate
- Providing input, where appropriate, during the review stages of the SSPs

The roles and responsibilities of the Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) include but is not limited to;

- 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 teacher or the mainstream class teacher
- Data collection/reporting on progress as determined by the teacher or Principal
- Providing special assistance to children as necessary
- Preparing materials/resources for the children, under the guidance of the teacher or the mainstream class teacher

- Providing input, where appropriate, during the review stages of the SSPs and attending SSP review meetings, where possible

The roles and responsibilities of the SENCO in Le Chéile includes;

- To inform teachers in Le Chéile of all SET meetings and invite them to contribute to the agenda
- To include, where possible, children from Le Chéile in whole school formal assessments and interventions

Integration and Inclusion

A core part of our philosophy as a mainstream school with autism classes is that the pupils in our Autism Class should feel strongly like both their Autism class and their mainstream class are 'theirs'. They should feel belonging and ownership in both spaces. They should feel like both teachers are 'theirs'.

Integration with neurotypical peers in inclusive mainstream classroom environments, in so far as possible, is the school's aim. The nature of all integration shall be determined by the Le Chéile class teacher following reviews at appropriate intervals and in consultation with the parents, mainstream class teacher, Principal and SNAs. It may be deemed necessary for an SNA to remain in the mainstream class with the child from Le Chéile however safety consideration must be given to the remaining children in the autism class. Where there is an SNA already in the mainstream class, they are encouraged to support the child from Le Chéile where possible. This will be discussed by the class teacher and relevant teacher in Le Chéile in consultation with the Principal.

“Reverse Integration” will be put in place for children where integration in the integrated setting is not appropriate. It can be used as a stepping stone to and/or in conjunction with Partial Integration. The focus of “Reverse Integration” will be on social and play skills only.

It is our aim that pupils will play on the school playground at lunchtimes. This ensures all pupils get an opportunity to interact with their peers in the mainstream class at least twice daily. If it transpires that the pupil should be removed from the school playground for their own safety or the safety of others, this will be discussed with parents in advance.

Pupils in Le Chéile are invited to participate in whole-school activities, e.g. Seachtain na Gaeilge, Winter Celebration and Assembly. Pupils in Le Chéile are also invited to participate in school tours and outings with their mainstream class. The Le Chéile team, in collaboration with parents, will decide on the suitability of the event for the pupils in their care.

Approaches to Teaching and Learning

The children will access a curriculum based on the Primary School Curriculum (1999) and the New Primary Language Curriculum that is matched to their needs and capabilities, through carefully planned SSPs and through the use of differentiation strategies. Subject areas include; English, Maths, Social Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE), Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Music, Visual Arts, Drama, Physical Education and Ethical Education. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessments Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities will be used to augment the implementation of the curriculum.

The Department of Education circular 0052/2019, states that all children in Autism Classes may be exempt from Gaeilge. Parents of children in Le Chéile who wish to avail of this exemption are free to do so in consultation with teaching staff and the Principal. Those who would like to learn Gaeilge, may do so in consultation with the aforementioned staff. It is the responsibility of the parents that their child has the appropriate exemption.

The Stay Safe and RSE programme are compulsory and must be delivered at an appropriately differentiated level each year as part of the school SPHE plan. If deemed appropriate, children will be integrated into their mainstream class for these discrete lessons. As children in the autism classroom are often mixed in age, the teacher will use sensitivity and discretion to ensure only the required children are present in the autism classroom during each individual lesson.

An eclectic approach to teaching shall be used within the autism class, that is, a range of approaches (including those used in the school's mainstream classes) shall be employed, based on the individual needs of the children.

The main approaches are as follows, but are not limited to;

- Child-led and teacher-led play
- Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication – Handicapped Children (TEACCH)
- Contemporary Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA),
- Attention Autism
- Lámh
- Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)
- ICT
- Visual supports
- Access to gross motor and sensory areas, where appropriate.
- The implementation of the primary school curriculum will be enhanced through a programme of trips to local places, designed to help further prepare the children for successful living in our community (playground visits, coffee shop, shopping tasks, post office, swimming, etc.).

Assessment

Similar assessment requirements apply in the autism classrooms as in mainstream classes. Teachers are required to keep assessment records with information relating to the learning progress of the students in the curriculum subjects that they are accessing. There may 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.

The assessment tools in use include but are not limited to; Verbal Behaviour Milestones Assessment and Placement Programme (VB-MAPP) and the Psychoeducational Profile – Third Edition (PEP-3).

Staffing

Each class is led by a classroom teacher. Additionally each class also benefits from support of two special needs assistants (SNAs).

We believe that pupil independence should be promoted wherever possible and, although there will be some opportunities for pupils to work 1:1 with staff throughout the day, we do not have a policy of providing continual 1:1 support for pupils.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

The BOM will support the accessing of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) by staff. Relevant specialist training is accessed via the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and relevant personnel on staff of CETNS. Mainstream class teachers are also encouraged to engage in relevant CPD in the area of autism.

The Role of Outside Services

Support from outside services such as the Health Service Executive (HSE), the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), etc., is available to the children and parents of the children in Le Chéile. However, due to a lack of resources and long waiting lists these resources are extremely limited. The school can liaise with members of the Children's Network Disability Team. However, it is the parents' responsibility to advocate for their child in relation to services.

Where a child has access to HSE or private therapists, those professionals will liaise with the autism teachers and/or visit the school from time to time.

Equipment and Resources

Children in Le Chéile often experience difficulty with sensory information in the environment. The classroom 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.

The children in Le Chéile will have access to equipment and resources which are recommended in their psychological reports, occupational therapy reports and speech & language therapy reports, where possible. When a recommendation is made for a child for a specific piece of equipment the school will endeavour to seek funding from the Department of Education where the equipment relates to furniture. Other equipment and resources will be purchased by the school where possible.

Resources and Assessment Kits, for example the VB-MAPP kit, PEP-3 kit and ABLLS, will remain in a central storage facility and can be loaned to Special Education Teachers and mainstream teachers, where needed.

The children in Le Chéile have access to the following areas for the purposes of regulation.

- A multi-sensory room
- A para-education room
- A quiet space off the main classroom
- A gross motor area
- A sensory den
- A safe outdoor area
- A Play Room

Access to these areas is dependent on the sensory profile of each child. The Le Chéile team, in collaboration with parents, will determine which areas and activities are most appropriate.

Reconstitution Autism Classes

The autism classes may be reconstituted at the discretion of class teachers in consultation with the principal. The emerging needs of all children need to be reflected on and consideration given to developmental stage, age, gender, learning styles, behaviours of concern, peer groups etc.

Communication with Parents/Guardians

The staff in Claregalway Educate Together 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:

- Seesaw Journal: Used by parents and teachers to communicate important information relating to the child, e.g. sleep habits, toileting, eating, independence. Class teachers are not obligated to respond to Seesaw enquiries outside of their working hours.
- Phone calls: Parents should be phoned in the incidence of more serious behaviour.
- Meetings: SSP meetings are scheduled three times per year with a review in June. Further meetings can be scheduled as required.
- Sharing documents: Parents will be provided with copies of support plans and other relevant documents at SSP meetings.
- Email: Parents can contact class teachers by email as required. Class teachers will respond to emails during their working hours.
- Class blogs: There is no class blog on the school website for Le Chéile as Seesaw is used instead. If a child integrates, they can access the class blog on the school website with a password. Teachers share pictures and details of class activities and events on class blogs.
- Active Participation in School Life: The parents in Le Chéile are encouraged to get involved as much as possible. This is central to our ethos in Claregalway Educate Together. For example, parents may be invited to assist the Le Chéile team with projects, swimming and tours.
- Support Network: The staff in Claregalway Educate Together strive to create a community of parents in Le Chéile that can support each other. We sometimes host social gatherings for our parents, e.g. coffee mornings.

Summer Provision

Claregalway ETNS will endeavour to provide two weeks of school-based Summer provision for pupils in the autism classes subject to securing staff (teachers and SNAs).

Reference to Other Policies

The Classes for Children with ASD Policy is linked to other policies within the school:

- The Code of Behaviour Policy
- Admissions and Participation Policy, including enrolment in the Special Class
- Safeguarding Staff Safeguarding Children Policy
- Special Educational Needs Policy

Success Criteria

Our Autism Class Policy will be seen to be working well when;

- We receive positive feedback from staff members and parents
- All staff and parents are made aware of and are committed to the principles that are outlined in this policy
- A quality driven, appropriate educational service is provided to all children in Le Chéile, within the requirements of all recent legislation pertaining to Special Needs Education
- All efforts are made to ensure the integration and inclusion of children in Le Chéile into mainstream education, having regard for levels of disability, available resources and suitability for such integration
- The aims set out at the beginning of this policy are achieved

Roles and Responsibility

All staff of the school, under the positive and supportive leadership of the Board of Management and Principal, have both a role and a responsibility in successfully implementing this policy.

The policy will be monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis by the policy committee through feedback from members of the school community.

Implementation Date

This policy will be implemented in 2023. Amendments will be implemented immediately.

Timetable for Review

This policy is to be reviewed during the school year xxx

Ratification and Communication

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

Date of ratification

Signed: _____
CHAIRPERSON OF BOM

Date: