



Dunderrow National School

*Autism Admissions Policy
for
Autism Class*

Dunderrow, Kinsale, Co. Cork P17 K504

Roll number: 169400

School Patron: Bishop Fintan Gavin, Diocese of Cork and Ross

1. Introductory Statement

Dunderrow National School is a Roman Catholic Primary School recognised by the Department of Education and Skills as a mixed primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Cork and Ross.

The school caters for the full range of classes from Junior Infants to Sixth Class. It is an inclusive school and caters for children of all abilities. While operating under the Patronage of the Catholic Bishop, Dunderrow N.S. welcomes children of all beliefs and none. Pupils are not refused admission on religious grounds and all efforts are made to include them fully in the school community.

There are eight Mainstream teachers, two autism class teachers, administrative Principal and seven full-time special educational needs teachers employed in the school. Dunderrow N.S. also shares another special educational needs teacher with another local school (one half day per week).

Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are assigned to the school by the Department of Education and Skills to enable the inclusion of children with special educational needs. Currently there are three SNAs in the mainstream classes and four SNAs in the two autism classes. The Department of Education and Skills sanctioned the employment of one permanent teacher and two SNAs for the new autism class which commenced in September 2024.

Dunderrow N.S. operates under the Rules for National Schools and Departmental Circulars and staff members are resourced by the Department of Education and Skills. The school is subject to the Education Act (1998), the Education Welfare Act (2000), the Education for Persons with Special Needs Act (2004) equality law and all other relevant legislation. Dunderrow N.S. follows the curricular programmes laid down by the Department of Education and Skills.

Dunderrow N.S. 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.

Dunderrow N.S. 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.

2. Rationale

This policy was written in preparation for the opening of the first autism class in this school in September 2022 and updated in January 2025.

Provision within the class

The autism class staff members provide the highest quality of education possible in collaboration with the external services children access and will be informed by and cooperate with those who provide multi-disciplinary support services such as Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Psychology and Social work. Special class staff will liaise with the Special Education Support Service, the National Council for Special Education and all other support agencies to access support and training on a regular basis. This class is a partnership between pupils, parents, staff and various outside agencies that support the school and work on behalf of all pupils.

3. Vision

Dunderrow N.S. aims to provide a caring learning environment where each child is welcomed, respected, cherished and facilitated in reaching their full potential whatever their background, nationality or belief, in keeping with the school's motto –Mol an Óige agus Tíocfaidh Sí. School staff members have, heretofore, adopted inclusive practices and liaise regularly with NCSE Behavioural Experts to ensure quality learning outcomes for all learners.

The autism classes are an additional support mechanism for pupils with the relevant diagnosis who meet admission criteria and where full-time mainstream education would not adequately meet their needs. Pupils attending these classes will be integrated into day-to-day activities of the school and it is envisaged that pupils

attending the class will, insofar as possible, participate in school-related events when considered appropriate and of benefit to them.

It is important that all pupils of this school feel secure and happy in school. The school aims to provide each pupil with an individualised programme of work that focuses on their strengths, interests and personalities. Importantly, it aims to support them through and instruct them on communication and social skills within a structured and safe environment, enabling them to achieve their full potential and experience a happy and fulfilling school life.

4. Mission Statement and Aims of the autism class

In its mission statement, Dunderrow N.S. aims to provide the means by which all pupils can flourish and reach their full potential, including a living relationship with God and with other people. Therefore, it follows that the mission statement for the autism class should echo this aim to provide a welcoming and child-centred learning environment where children develop holistically and achieve their full potential in their academic, creative, personal, physical, moral and spiritual development. Methodologies and pedagogies reflect current teaching guidelines and good practice in relation to pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. The autism classes aim to create learning opportunities in a setting of diversity and inclusion. The mission is for all pupils attending our autism classes to learn to their full potential in a caring, educational and safe environment. It is hoped that children enrolled in these classes experience meaningful integration with their typically developing peers in a variety of ways through whole class integration, reverse integration, paired work and through play.

The Board of Management of the school and the staff and personnel of the autism classes aim to

- reduce / remove barriers to learning through the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum that meets each child's needs, including access to the Primary School Curriculum, and other curricula for the provision of Special Educational Needs
- assist children to develop effective systems of communication and social interaction, easing their primary schooling and fostering life-long skills that encourage meaningful relationships with others
- develop a child's ability to adapt to and accommodate change
- encourage children to manage their own behaviour and difficulties positively
- provide an environment that fosters care and monitors and provides interventions for pupils to enhance learning opportunities
- provide inclusive opportunities for pupils to integrate into mainstream activities as part of the continuum of education provision enshrining their place as members of the school community
- work in partnership with parents/carers and other professionals

5. Curriculum

Pupils are encouraged to develop a sense of responsibility, self-esteem, self-confidence, self advocacy and self-discipline. The school plays an active role in promoting these qualities. Through direct intervention and by adult example, pupils are encouraged to develop an awareness and respect for each other, the staff and their

surroundings. Pupils are also encouraged to care for their own belongings and respect those of others, to foster appropriate and socially acceptable forms of behaviour, to take pride in their own strengths and achievements and to take responsibility for their actions. Each pupil is supported in developing individual strategies and responses to diffuse or manage potentially difficult situations. Staff members and school personnel emphasise, recognise and reward positive behaviour.

Student Support Files and Personal Pupil Plans will be put in place for each pupil. These will be drawn up in consultation with parents and the relevant outside agencies. In order for the teacher to develop individualised educational plans, a period of observation and baseline assessment will be necessary. All behaviour management programmes are discussed with parents and appropriate strategies applicable at home and in school are developed.

Pupils generally respond well to the structured environment of the school day and routines and staff members aim to manage or modify difficult behaviours. Parents are encouraged to approach the school if they wish to discuss a particular problem.

6. Meeting with Parents / Guardians and Children

Meetings may be held with Parents / Guardians and children seeking admission to the autism class to discuss the individual needs of the child. Permission will be sought from the parents to visit the child's pre-school placement (where relevant) or current placement with a view to speaking to staff members about the child's needs, academic / social development, capabilities and limitations. Consultation will also occur with the professionals who compiled the most up-to-date reports for each child. If it is considered from these meetings and conversations that the school can address the child's needs successfully (and the child is capable of meaningful integration both in the autism class and in the mainstream classroom) then the child and family will be invited to the school to become accustomed to the school and to meet with staff.

7. Yearly Review

Placement in the autism class is subject to a yearly review. The review will be carried out by school staff with parental involvement. The outcome of the review will be examined by the Board of Management.

In the event that it is determined that the child is not suitably placed in the school, having regard to the capacity of the school and the needs of the child concerned, the Board shall liaise with appropriate agencies in an effort to find a more suitable placement.

8. Registration Procedure for the Autism Class

Criteria for Admission

1. Each child must have an assessment report and diagnosis of Autism / Autistic Spectrum Disorder using the DSM IV/ V or ICD diagnostic criteria as set out by a multi-disciplinary team approved by the Department of Education and Skills. Where there is insufficient information provided about a child, the Board of Management may not be in a position to make a decision on enrolment eligibility.
2. A recommendation that a Special Class placement within a mainstream school is best suited to the

child's needs must be clearly stated in the child's psychological assessment.

3. As inclusion is an integral part of the school's ethos, it is a necessary criteria of enrolment that any child attending the Special Class must have the potential to integrate meaningfully to the mainstream classroom setting. Thus, their level of need must not prevent the child from interacting or behaving appropriately. The child's cognitive level must allow him / her to integrate academically and socially in the mainstream school setting as well as the Autism class. The level of integration, duration and timing will be decided by the Principal and staff of the autism class in consultation with mainstream teachers, parents of the child in question and on the basis of information shared at review meetings.
4. A fully completed *Expression of Interest* form must be filled in by the parents and any relevant reports must be submitted to the school. The completion of an *Expression of Interest* form does not constitute an offer of a place.
5. The child must be at least 4 years of age on or before the 30th April prior to starting school.

In the event that the number of children that meet the above criteria (1-5) is greater than the number of places available, the following categories shall be used as a basis for prioritising children. Prioritisation will follow the sequence indicated in the additional criteria (A and B) below.

Additional Criteria A:

1. Children with an Autism diagnosis, currently enrolled in the school with a recommendation that an Autism Class placement within a mainstream school best suits the child's needs and this is stated clearly in the child's psychological assessment.
2. Priority is given to brothers and sisters of children currently attending Dunderrow N.S., including step-siblings or foster siblings, resident at the same address.
3. Suitability for admission considering the needs / age / abilities of those currently enrolled and those seeking admission.
4. Children of staff members.
5. Children living in the catchment area of the parish of Kinsale.

then

Additional Criteria B:

1. Children living outside the catchment area of Kinsale unless the area in which they live is within the catchment area of another mainstream school which has vacancies in **its Autism class(es)**.

Points to note:

1. As inclusion is an integral part of the school's ethos, it is a necessary criteria of enrolment that any child attending the Special Class must have the potential to integrate meaningfully to the mainstream

classroom setting. Thus, their level of need must not prevent the child from interacting or behaving appropriately. The child's cognitive level must allow him / her to integrate academically and socially in the mainstream school setting as well as the autism class ie. the minimum level of cognitive functioning eligible is a mild general learning disability. A child shall not be admitted if behaviour is such that she/he is a danger to herself/himself and/or to others.

2. Autistic Spectrum Disorder classes are not suitable for children with multiple disabilities.
3. The child must be able to use a regular toilet with or without assistance.
4. All relevant reports and assessments must accompany application to enroll form including O.T. or Speech and Language report, if relevant. Where there is insufficient information provided about a child, the Board of Management may not be able to make a decision.
5. The Principal and SEN teacher(s) meet with the parent(s) of the child to discuss the child's needs. This meeting is not a condition of enrollment.

Registration Procedure for Autism Class for September 2025

Currently we have 2 Autism classes

If a space becomes available during the school year 2024/2025, the Board of Management will consider applications before the start of Term 2 in each school year only.

Closing date for new September 2025 places is 10th February 2025. All applications for places received will be responded to within 21 school days of the closing day for the submission of applications.

Requests for enrolment forms should be made to:

Autism Class Admissions,

Dunderrow N.S.

Dunderrow,

Kinsale,

Co. Cork.

Telephone: (021) 4774041

It is the duty of parent/guardians to ensure that with the application form the school has the following:

A diagnosis from a multi-disciplinary team that has assessed and classified the applicant as having autism or autistic spectrum disorder according to DSM IV-V or ICD criteria.

Applicants may be required to provide documentation in relation to previous unsuccessful Autism Class

applications.

N.B. If the school does not receive this documentation with the *Expression of Interest* form the application will not be processed.

9. Return of Forms of Acceptance

Letters of offer for places in the Autism Class for children with an autism diagnosis will be sent by post to the address provided on *Expression of Interest* forms upon confirmation of a vacancy. Acceptance forms must be returned within 10 school days of the letter of offer. If the school does not receive the acceptance form the place will be offered to another applicant.

10. Unsuccessful Applications

In the event of the number of applicants exceeding the number of places all unsuccessful applicants will be informed in writing by post.

Registration alone does not guarantee a place in the school. Decisions in relation to applications for enrolment are made by the school in accordance with the admissions policy.

All unsuccessful applicants have a right of appeal under Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998.

11. Equality of Access

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

12. Discharge Policy

It is school policy to facilitate the discharge of pupils from the Autism Class once they have reached twelve years of age. Pupils who reach the age of 12 after September 30th in any year will be permitted to complete that academic year, meaning a June discharge in the following year. Discharge may also be recommended after the first year if the school, after consultation with Parents / Guardians, feel that placement is not appropriate. Discharge from the Autism Class may also happen if a pupil is fully integrated into the mainstream school.

13. Evaluation

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

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

It was ratified by the Board of Management on 10/02/25



Una Feeney, Chairperson BOM



Triona Hannon, Principal