

## SCOIL MHUIRE, HOWTH PRIMARY SCHOOL



### PROTOCOLS FOR SPECIAL CLASS FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

Note: These protocols should be considered in the context of the Admission Policy.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Scoil Mhuire, Howth Primary School is a mainstream co-educational primary school with an enrolment of approximately 370 pupils. With a growing awareness of the increasing need for provision for pupils with Autism in our local area and with a strong desire to support our community, the decision to provide a special class for children with a diagnosis of Autism was taken by the Board of Management of the school in conjunction with the principal and staff in March 2025.

#### 2. AIMS

Howth Primary School strives to offer a positive meaningful educational experience, which allows every child to develop to their full learning potential in a stimulating, caring and welcoming environment. The special class will offer a curriculum which will endeavour to meet the needs of the individual children and provide them with the necessary skills to live as independently a life as possible.

#### 3. OUTLINE

The special class at Howth Primary School is a class for children with Autism who have been recommended for placement in an Autism class in a mainstream primary school.

The maximum class size is 6 pupils.

The Board of Management will, in so far as is possible, limit the age range in the class to 4 years from youngest to oldest.

All placements will be reviewed annually in order to ensure that the placement continues to be appropriate for each child.

#### 4. CRITERIA FOR ENROLMENT

In accordance with Circular Letter 02/05, Circular 0080/2024 and NCSE Guidelines for Setting Up and Organising Special Classes for Boards of Management and Principals of Primary and Post Primary Schools (2024), a child will only be deemed eligible for an offer of placement when all the following criteria have been met:

- Professional report(s) outlining a diagnosis of Autism: DSM IV/V or ICD 10/11 (psychologist, psychiatrist, multi-disciplinary report),
- A demonstration of the understanding of complexity of the child's overall level of need/s evidenced in the professional reports,
- A clear professional recommendation for a special class in a mainstream school and the rationale for same.

Parents will also be required to complete an application form and submit all relevant documents pertaining to same.

## 5. APPLICATION PROCESS

Enrolment application forms for the Autism class will be accepted during the submission dates set out in our Annual Admissions Notice on our school website.

Receipt of acknowledgement of an enrolment application by the school does not constitute an offer of a place nor does it guarantee a place in the school. It is simply the recording of an application for admission to our school. Decisions in relation to applications for enrolment are made by the Board of Management in accordance with our admission policy.

The enrolment application must be accompanied by all of the following supporting documentation supplied by parents/guardians:

- An original Birth Certificate.
- Two original documents, as proof of address: Utility bill, Bank statement, Insurance policy, Social insurance document or a Document issued by a government department showing your address. These must be dated within three months of application.
- A written assessment and classification of autism or ASD by a psychiatrist or clinical psychologist using DSM-IV/V or ICD-10 criteria OR multi-disciplinary assessment of same by a professional team, including a clinical psychologist.
- A written recommendation by the relevant professionals that a special class placement in a mainstream school is both necessary and suitable for the child. This recommendation should be no older than two years, and the report should detail the complexity of the child's overall level of need.
- All other relevant reports – speech & language therapy/ occupational therapy and psychological reports.

Disclosure of all pre-existing medical needs is required and any relevant reports in this context should be forwarded to the school.

## 6. ADMISSIONS TEAM

All applications will undergo team assessment by the **Admissions Team** to ensure that the application fulfils the enrolment criteria outlined in the admissions policy. The admissions team is made up of the school principal, deputy principal, Special Education Needs Coordinator and special class teacher. The team may seek the advice of the school's allocated NEPS psychologist. The role of the admissions team is to:

- Ascertain how many places are to be filled in the AS class.
- Review all applications and all documentation relevant to a child applying for a place in the special class.
- Verify that there is a recommendation from the psychologist/ psychiatrist for a placement in a special class in a mainstream school.
- Prioritise each qualifying applicant with reference to the admissions criteria.
- Make a recommendation based on these findings to the Board of Management.

## **7. OFFER OF PLACE**

If offered a place, it must be accepted within the time period specified on the admissions notice. If this confirmation is not received within this timeframe, the school will take it that the place is not being accepted and the place will be reallocated.

Notification of admissions to special classes must be forwarded to the NCSE within 14 calendar days of a school confirming that an offer of admission has been accepted. All offers by the school are subject to NCSE Application and Approval.

Places cannot be deferred. A full application would be required the following year.

The parents/guardians of a child who have been offered a place in the class will be invited to visit the school to meet with the special class teacher and the Principal of the school. Any information requested by the parents will be provided at this meeting.

The parents/guardians will be invited on another occasion to come with their child to the class to meet with staff in the special class and see the classroom.

## **8. STUDENT SUPPORT FILE**

Once the child has started in Howth Primary School's Autism class and after a period of time observing, assessing and interacting with the child, a Student Support File will be developed in consultation with parents and relevant professionals. This will be reviewed on an on-going basis and will highlight priority-learning needs. These needs will be targeted through the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum.

A placement review will take place at the end of each year to assess whether the child's placement is appropriate. The review will be carried out by school staff in consultation with parents. The outcome of the review will be examined by the Board of Management. In the event that a placement is inappropriate, the school will liaise with appropriate agencies in an effort to obtain a more suitable placement.

## **9. INCLUSION**

Each child in the special class will be assigned to an age appropriate mainstream class for inclusion purposes provided it is in the best interests of the child, while having due regard to the educational benefit of all pupils enrolled in our school. Every opportunity will be used to promote inclusion in mainstream classes provided the child is ready for this step and has the necessary supports in place.

The nature of the inclusion shall be determined by the special class teacher following reviews at appropriate intervals and in consultation with parents, mainstream class teacher, Principal and SNAs. Inclusion can take a number of forms:

- Partial Inclusion will take the form of contact during specific situations or curricular areas, where particular skills and interests and/ or learning can be advanced.
- Reverse inclusion may be put in place for children where inclusion in the mainstream setting is not appropriate. It can be used as a stepping stone to, and/ or, in conjunction with Partial Inclusion. It involves the interaction of a group of children from the mainstream class which

takes place in the special class. The focus of reverse inclusion will be on social and play skills only.

- The minimum level of integration and inclusion for all pupils, where appropriate, will include lunch times, small group activities and playground breaks.

## **9. BEHAVIOUR**

While some children with special educational needs may display difficult, defiant or oppositional behaviours, all efforts will be made by the school to find the root cause of these behaviours and manage them using various strategies, through the implementation of the child's Student Support File. All pupils in Howth Primary School are subject to the school's Code of Behaviour and the Health and Safety Statement. Where a child's behaviour impacts in a negative way on the other children in the special class or another mainstream class to the extent that their constitutional rights to education are being interfered with, or where the health and safety of pupils or staff are compromised, 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.

## **10. DISCHARGE POLICY**

It is school policy to facilitate the discharge of pupils from the special class once they have completed 6th class or have reached the age of thirteen. Pupils who reach the age of 13 after 30<sup>th</sup> September in any year will be permitted to complete that academic year.

Discharge may also be recommended after the first and/or any subsequent year if following psychological assessments and consultation with the parents/guardians, it is felt that the placement is no longer appropriate and serves the best interest of the child. Discharge from the special classes may also happen if a pupil is fully integrated into the mainstream school.

## **11. HEALTH SERVICE EXECUTIVE (HSE) INPUT**

Essential services may be provided by the HSE, e.g. speech and language therapy and occupational therapy. Howth Primary School has no control over these services. All queries about these services must be addressed to the HSE.