**Introduction**

Scoil Bhríde is a co-educational vertical primary school with 3 autism classes for children with a diagnosis of autism. Scoil Bhríde is a mainstream, inclusive school and all pupils are provided with opportunities to participate in the full range of activities offered on and off site. Where there are barriers to learning or participation, there is an expectation that differentiation and the appropriate targeted support will enable access. At Scoil Bhríde we believe ‘‘*all teachers are teachers of children with special educational needs. Teaching such children is therefore a whole school responsibility*.”

**Inclusion versus Integration.**

An **integrated** classroom is a setting where students with additional educational needs or special educational needs (SEN) learn alongside their neurotypical peers. Integration expects the child with additional needs to ‘fit in’ with the mainstream class however, **inclusion** is the actual merging **of special education** and regular **education** with the belief that all children are different, will learn differently, and should have full access to the same curriculum. In Inclusive Education **we** change our expectations, classroom environment and teaching methodologies to fit the child’s needs.

**Inclusive Education**

The NCSE (2011) described inclusion as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of learners. It involves removing barriers so that each learner will be enabled to achieve the maximum benefit from his/her schooling. The whole school approach of Scoil Bhríde endeavours to foster an inclusive culture which is characterised by:

● A positive ethos and learning environment whereby all pupils, including those with additional educational needs, feel welcome and experience a sense of community and belonging

● An emphasis on promoting pupils’ participation and active engagement in their learning and in the life of the school

● A commitment to developing pupils’ academic, social, emotional and independent living skills

● A focus on high aspirations and on improving outcomes for all pupils

**Scoil Bhríde’s Autism Classes for autistic children**

‘*Special classes are part of a continuum of educational provision that enables students with more complex 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. Students enrolled in Scoil Bhríde’s autism classes should be included in mainstream classes to the greatest extent possible, in line with their abilities. Students in autism classes are counted twice for teacher allocation purposes: they are counted in determining teacher allocation to the autism classes and separately in determining the overall mainstream teacher allocation for a school. This is intended to support their inclusion in mainstream classes, as appropriate. An autism class has a 6:1 pupil teacher ratio.

Two special needs assistants (SNAs) are allocated to each class. Additional SNA posts for the class are considered on the basis of the individually assessed needs of the pupils attached to the class. In Scoil Bhríde we are fortunate to have 3 classes for autistic children; junior, middle and senior classes. When parents enrol their child in our school, they are made aware (at junior infants’ meetings or during the enrolment process of older children) that Scoil Bhríde is an inclusive school and children from our autism classes may, at some time, be included in their child’s class either for reverse integration, academic lessons or social trips.

**Mainstream Inclusion Process**

The inclusion process should be specific and tailored to each individual child. Commencement and progression through the below stages should be based on each child’s needs and abilities. Records of mainstream inclusion are useful resources to keep as evidence of child’s progression or lack thereof through the inclusion process.

1. **Identify class number** **on door-** when the child is on movement breaks around school pass their mainstream classroom and bring attention to the number on the door.
2. **Visit empty classroom**- allow the child to explore his/her empty mainstream classroom (mainstream class at P.E. etc). walk around classroom.
3. **Photograph of mainstream teacher**- teaching mainstream teachers name and matching it to their picture.
4. **Mainstream teachers’ picture on classroom door**- child matches picture to picture during movement breaks /transitions around school.
5. **Child greets mainstream teacher during yard time**- explicit teaching of greetings takes place in class first at child’s own level e.g. Lámh sign for hello, communicating verbally etc. Greet teacher on yard when prompted by teacher/SNA to do so.
6. **Greets teacher on yard**- prompted by SNA to walk up to and greets mainstream teacher independently.
7. **Child brings note to mainstream class teacher**- Initially completing activity with teacher, then as child becomes more confident, teacher support is withdrawn and SNA support commences, gradually reducing SNA supports from verbal to physical/pictorial prompts. Child communicates with mainstream teacher/ class using their own established method of communication e.g. Lámh signs/ picture signs or verbal communication e.g. (Verbally communicates “Excuse me Múinteoir \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, a note for you”)

* Knocks on door, class teacher comes to door to collect the door.
* Knocks on the door, child enters classroom, mainstream teacher at the top of the class, child greets teacher and passes on note.
* Knocks on door, child enters and walks to teacher wherever they are in the classroom and passes on note.

1. **Begin planning with mainstream teacher** for commencement of mainstream inclusion lessons, usually beginning with non-academic lessons e.g. Golden Time, Aistear, Yard games.

If required autism class teacher will remain with child for initial lessons, gradually reducing teacher support to SNA support. Time spent in mainstream will depend on the needs and abilities of each individual child.

1. When deemed appropriate, teachers can begin planning for **inclusion of more traditional academic lessons.**
2. Where possible, **adult support for inclusion in lessons should be reduced** as the child progresses through primary school e.g. SNA will support for safe transition to and from mainstream class but adult does not remain with child during mainstream lessons.
3. **Regular communication between mainstream and autism class teachers** is essential to ensure successful implementation of each child’s individual mainstream inclusion objectives.

**Including Mainstream Peers**

Before formal inclusion begins the mainstream teacher should engage in open discussion with the pupils in their class regarding the process of inclusion. This information should be presented in a child-friendly, age-appropriate manner. Simple explanations regarding the process of inclusion, why it is happening, what it will look like, the name of pupil and lessons/times inclusion will occur should be provided in younger classes. In older classes the inclusion process should be used as an opportunity to discuss additional needs, including but not limited to autism. Conversations regarding individual differences and tolerance should also be explored. Utilising age-appropriate information from autism.ie or the AsIAm website will inform your teaching and explanations. (See Appendix 2)

**Reverse Integration**

If needed, Reverse Integration can be completed with a child from the autism classes and 3 or 4 of their mainstream peers. Reverse integration takes place in the child’s own classroom whereby children from their mainstream class come to have social interactions with the child in his/her own class for a number of weeks. Other children from the autism classes should not be present when children from mainstream come to visit.

* Lesson & activities prepped before reverse integration takes place. Social stories should be utilised to explain and communicate actions and expectations of the child from the autism class.
* Children from mainstream class engage in open discussions with their teacher and autism class teacher before lessons take place.
* Child from autism class should be encouraged to introduce themselves and greet their peers. To further develop awareness and develop relationships with mainstream peers, greetings should be encouraged during yard time.
* Open communication between both classrooms is essential to normalise this process. Allow time for discussion and review when children arrive back to mainstream classroom.

**Collaboration with Mainstream Teachers**

Identification of next year’s mainstream teacher should be known for each child in the autism class before the summer holidays. Discussions regarding the steps towards inclusion should take place between the autism classes and mainstream teacher in September of the next academic year. Children from the autism classes should complete initial steps of inclusion process in September, becoming familiar with their new mainstream class teacher and mainstream classroom. Formalised mainstream inclusion should begin in **October** of the new academic year. Opportunities should be provided for mainstream teachers to visit the autism classes to observe the child working in their own class before they are included in mainstream classroom. This observation process aims to allow both the mainstream teacher and the child an opportunity to meet and establish a relationship before the mainstream inclusion begins. Provision should be included in the continuum document regarding inclusion protocols for when a mainstream teacher is on EPV days, in meetings or is absent. These provisions should be child-dependent e.g. if a mainstream teacher is absent and a substitute teacher is present the child from the autism classes may be more comfortable returning to their own class. Where possible, advanced notice of absences should be given to the autism class teacher, in order to prepare the child for the changers to their schedule. Academic inclusion for 6th class children will cease in the final few weeks of June; children from the autism classes who are in 6th class, will continue inclusion activities, where applicable, for social activities e.g. graduation preparation, school musical, end of year trip etc. Where possible, for off-site inclusion activities, the autism class teacher should accompany the child/children from the autism class on the school trip.

**Target setting & Inclusion Goals**

Utilising the academic and social goals, as outlined in each child’s I.E.P, mainstream inclusion goals should be established for each child based on their abilities and their needs. This process requires open communication for all parties to ensure mutual understanding of the inclusion process. In setting goals teachers endeavour to set targets which are achievable within a specified time frame and also challenge and build on existing knowledge and address pupils’ holistic needs.

Best practice indicates that **targets** should be

● Few in number

● Strengths based

● Informed by priority learning needs

● Directly linked to suitable interventions

● Evidence based

**Monitoring the Inclusion process**

Monitoring outcomes is part of a dynamic process of identification, target-setting, intervention and review, which in turn leads to adjustments in support plans. This Mainstream Inclusion Document provides teachers with a useful resource to support and record the process. Effective monitoring of progress, and subsequent adaptation of support plans, are key drivers of effective practice. In addition to monitoring outcomes at the individual level, we believe that it is also important to review outcomes at group, class and whole-school level. This review includes measures of attainment, communication, independence, attendance, social inclusion and well-being (for example, sense of belonging and connectedness to school) for pupils with additional educational needs.

**Promoting Autism Awareness in Scoil Bhríde**

Raising awareness and understanding of autism through various activities:

* Autism Awareness Month- World Autism Awareness day- Educating children on autism (websites, videos, lessons -Appendix 1.)
* Donation to support autism classes or donation towards Autism Charity
* Autism Awareness Posters- designed and hung around school
* Reverse integration activities where each class levels gets a chance to visit the special class, Ball-pool and Snoozelen- provide children from mainstream classes an opportunity to explore the facilities we have in our school to support the learning of autistic children.

**Mainstream Inclusion Record- Continuum Document**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Mainstream Inclusion Record**  **Continuum Document** | |
| **Name** |  |
| **Autism classes Level and Teacher** |  |
| **Mainstream Class and Teacher (Room No.)** |  |
| **Description of Needs and Educational Implications** |  |
| **Goals of Inclusion** | |
| **Social Goals Of Inclusion** |  |
| **Academic Goals Of Inclusion** |  |
| **Proposed Inclusion for academic Year** |  |
| **Daily Timetable of Inclusion for Academic Year** | **Monday:**  **Tuesday:**  **Wednesday:**  **Thursday:**  **Friday:** |
| **Differentiation required in Mainstream class for Inclusion** | **Seating/Noise/Sensory Needs/Homework/Books/Supplies** |
| **Protocols if mainstream teacher is absent** |  |
| **Role of SNA in Inclusion** |  |
| **Inclusion in Sacramental Class** |  |
| **Inclusion in Mainstream Class Activities/ Tours/ performances etc.** |  |
| **Monitoring and Reviewing Inclusion Process** | |
| **What will it look like if Inclusion Social Goals are met?** |  |
| **What will it look like if Inclusion Academic Goals are met?** |  |
| **Are any changes to the inclusion process required/ recommended?** |  |
| **Additional Comments** |  |
| **To be completed at end of Academic Year** | |
| **Summary of Inclusion for Academic Year** |  |
| **Has copy of Inclusion Continuum been passed onto next year’s teacher?** |  |

**APPENDIX 1- Resources**

**Books**

* *All My Stripes: A Story for Children with Autism* by Shaina Rudolph and Danielle Royer (ages 6+)
* *Andy and His Yellow Frisbee* by Mary Thompson (ages 5-8)
* *The Autism Acceptance Book: Being a Friend to Someone with Autis*m by Ellen Sabin (ages 6+)
* *Ethan's Story; My Life with Autism* by Ethan Rice (ages 8-12)
* *What it is to Be Me!* by Angela Wine (ages 4+)
* *Can I tell you about Autism? A guide for friends, family and professionals* by Jude Welton (ages 7+)
* *Can I tell you about Asperger Syndrome? A guide for friends and family* by Jude Welton (ages 9+)
* *My Friend with Autism* by Beverly Bishop (ages 4+)
* *My Brother Charlie* by Holly Robinson Peete and Ryan Elizabeth Peete (ages 7-11)
* *Different Like Me: My Book of Autism Heroes* by Jennifer Elder (ages 8-12)
* *Everybody is Different* by Fiona Bleach (ages 9+)
* *I See Things Differently: A First Look at Autism* by Pat Thomas (ages 4+)
* *Nathan's Autism Spectrum Superpowers* by Lori Yarborough (ages 5+)

**Websites**

* <http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Supporting_14_05_13_web.pdf>
* <https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/InclusiveEducationFramework_InteractiveVersion.pdf>
* <http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/4_NCSE_SpecSchlsClas.pdf>
* <https://asiam.ie/>
* <https://asiam.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Sensory-Checklist-1.pdf> (Environmental sensory checklist)
* <https://www.middletownautism.com/>
* <https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/aut/pdf/ASD_Document.pdf>
* <https://www.teachmeaboutautism.com/for-kids-short.html>

**Child Friendly YouTube Videos**

* <https://www.autismspeaks.org/autism-statistics> (Introductory video on ASD)
* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RuV8AddbXIs&feature=youtu.be&app=desktop&ab\_channel=SesameStreetInCommunities (Sesame Street Videos about Autism)
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIK2yXfrCfw&feature=emb_err_woyt> (George tells us about his life with Autism)
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wc77MksM_2c&ab_channel=MarvelousMaxAutismAwarenessforSchoolKids>
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUbsyd8Fnyw&ab_channel=AutismExplained>
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DrrXMO-NrCM&ab_channel=HouseOfTheSpirits1> (Autism explained)
* <https://youtu.be/RuV8AddbXIs>

**APPENDIX 2**

**Information for Classmates**

**What is Autism?** Autism is a difference in the way a kid's brain develops. Autistic children may have trouble understanding the world around them. Autistic children might have trouble:

* talking and learning the meaning of words
* making friends or fitting in
* dealing with changes (like trying new foods, having a substitute teacher, or having toys moved from their normal places)
* dealing with loud noises, bright lights, or crowds

Kids also might move in an unusual way (like flapping their hands) or do the same thing over and over (like saying the same word). Autistic children may have a little trouble with these things, or a lot. Some kids need only a little bit of help, and others might need a lot of help with learning and doing everyday stuff. Whether you already know a student with autism or are just getting to know one, you’ll probably find this information helpful. If you make the effort to include, communicate, understand and respect, you’ll both be sure to get something out of your friendship.

**How can we support our autistic classmates?**

1. Take the initiative to include him – he/she may desperately want to be included and may not know how to ask. Be specific about what you want him/her to do.
2. Find common interests - It will be much easier to talk about or share something you both like to do (movies, sports, music, books, TV shows, etc.).
3. Encourage him/her to try new things because sometimes he may be afraid to try new stuff. Don’t ignore him/her even if you think he/she doesn’t notice you.
4. Communicate clearly - Speak at a reasonable speed and volume. It might be helpful to use short sentences. Use gestures, pictures, and facial expressions to help communicate.
5. Give feedback - If your autistic friend is doing something inappropriate, it’s OK to tell him/her nicely. Just be sure to also tell him/her what the right thing to do is because he/she may not know.
6. Take time to say ‘hi’ whenever you see him/her. Even when you’re in a hurry and pass him/her in the hall, just saying ‘hi’ is nice.
7. Be persistent and patient - Remember that your friend with autism may take more time to respond than other people. It doesn’t necessarily mean he/she isn’t interested.
8. Remember sensory sensitivity - Your friend may be very uncomfortable in certain situations or places (crowds, noisy areas, etc.).
9. Find out what his/her special interests or abilities are and then try to find ways to let him/her use them.
10. Ask questions – Ask a teacher if you’re confused about behaviours. There is a reason kids do things. If you figure it out, you might be able to help him/her.
11. Remember- Accept his or her differences and respect strengths just as you would for any friend.