



Inclusion Policy

Introduction:

Stratford NS is a co-educational national school with 2 classes for children with a diagnosis of autism. It is a mainstream, inclusive school where diversity in all its forms is valued and respected. All children are provided with equitable opportunities to participate in the full range of activities offered by the school. Inclusion at Stratford NS is understood as the active removal of barriers to learning and participation so that every child — regardless of ability, background, identity, learning need, or personal circumstance — can access meaningful education and experience a genuine sense of belonging. Inclusion in the school is grounded in the principles of access, participation, belonging and wellbeing for every child. We believe that inclusion is a shared responsibility across the whole school community, and we are committed to fostering an environment where every child is supported to reach their full potential. Differentiation, universal design for learning, targeted interventions, and appropriate support systems are some of the strategies used in the school to enable access and engagement for all children.

The policy was devised following consultation with all stake holders including school staff, parents, the Board of Management and the National Education Psychological Service (NEPS).

Inclusion versus Integration:

Inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of learners through enabling participation in learning, cultures, and communities and removing barriers within and from education through the accommodation and provision of appropriate structures and arrangements to enable each learner to achieve the maximum benefit from his/her attendance at school. (NCSE *Inclusive Education Framework* 2011).

Integration expects children to 'fit in' and to adapt their behaviour to work within existing class structures. The child is expected to adapt. Inclusion is the belief that all children are different, will learn differently, and should have full access to the same curriculum. In inclusive education, the school adapts its expectations, classroom environment and teaching methodologies to fit the child's needs.

Inclusion means that all students:

- Are valued and respected members of the school community
- Have equitable access to learning, play, and social participation
- Are supported to participate meaningfully in school life
- Experience a sense of belonging, safety, dignity, and respect

Pupils will be supported to engage in aspects of the curriculum and school activities that are appropriate to their individual abilities, interests and readiness. As children join the school, their inclusion in mainstream settings will be carefully planned and supported, with opportunities for increased participation as pupils develop the skills and confidence to engage meaningfully.

Rationale:

This policy was formulated to

- Define inclusion and provide the teaching staff with clear well-defined guidelines on best practice in Stratford NS.
- Ensure consistency of approach across the school.
- Provide optimum learning experiences for all children enrolled in the school.



Stratford NS Autism Classes:

'Special classes enable students with more complex / severe special educational needs to be educated, in smaller 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.'¹

The school recognises that special classes are part of the wider inclusive school community. Children enrolled in our special classes are full members of our school community. They have the same rights to access, participation, and belonging as all other children. Stratford NS is committed to promoting meaningful participation of pupils enrolled in the autism classes in mainstream class settings to the maximum extent appropriate to their individual needs, with decisions guided by assessment, consultation and the principle of least restrictive environment.

Roles and Responsibilities:

Principal:

- Direct responsibility for co-ordinating an effective whole school approach to inclusion.
- Responsibility for the provision of in-service training and adequate resourcing.
- Facilitate staff to access professional learning opportunities and relevant training from the NCSE.
- Monitor the effectiveness of the policy and making relevant adjustment following consultation.
- Liaise with parents and out of school agencies.

Special Class Teacher(s):

- Collaborate with mainstream class teachers and SNAs to plan for inclusion and inclusive learning experiences
- Ensure S.N.A support is available during inclusion.
- Collaborate and consult with mainstream class teachers in setting realistic targets.
- Assume responsibility for an on-going student support plan in consultation with support services, parents and Principal.
- Teach the children about empathy, diversity and respect through lessons and daily school life
- Gather and respond to pupils' views, preferences and feedback to guide planning and participation (sample templates p12-15)
- Share this information with the relevant class teacher.

Class Teachers:

- Collaborate and consult with special class teachers, SNAs and the SET team in setting realistic targets for the children's School Support Plans
- Adapt learning experiences and the classroom environment to meet the needs of the children.
- Establish buddy systems to promote the development of friendships, connection and a sense of belonging
- Encourage peer learning and collaboration
- Teach the children about empathy, diversity and respect through lessons and daily school life
- Provide sensory-friendly spaces and suitable, flexible seating options.
- Utilise visual supports and timetables and modified teaching approaches
- Incorporate the child's voice into planning for inclusion.

¹ <https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/NCSE-Guidelines-for-Setting-Up-and-Organising-Special-Classes-2024-ENG.pdf> p2



SNA(s):

- Support participation, regulation, independence, and wellbeing
- Work as part of a collaborative, inclusive team

Parent(s)/Guardian(s):

- Encourage their child to participate in activities where they can meet children of the same age with different abilities.
- Encourage their child to develop friendship with classmates or other neighbourhood children.
- Discuss their goals, expectations and preferences for their child with regards to inclusion with their teachers before going to school.
- Work in partnership with the class teacher in devising a suitable inclusion plan for their child.

Children

- *Treat everyone with kindness, respect and fairness.*
- *Celebrate differences and understand that everyone is unique.*
- *Help and support each other*
- *Follow our anti-bullying rules and speak up if we see unkind behaviour.*
- *Learn about empathy, diversity and respect through our lessons and daily school life.*

Board of Management

- Promote the school's commitment to inclusive education, through regular reviews of the school's policies and procedures
- Ensures policies align with national guidance and legal obligations
- Provide necessary resourcing and prioritisation of inclusive practice

Implementation:

Stratford NS promotes inclusion in groups that best meet pupils' social and academic needs. Pupils may learn with their age-appropriate peers to support the development of relationships and social skills, or where appropriate, may access learning with a different age group if this better supports their academic progress and individual learning needs.

All children are entitled to access and participate in mainstream educational settings. Decisions regarding the nature and level of participation, and the supports required, will be informed by collaborative professional judgement and tailored to individual needs.

Steps to implementation:

- Opportunities for participation in mainstream settings will be planned collaboratively by autism class teachers, mainstream teachers and relevant staff, based on each child's strengths, needs and interests.
- Targets and supports for children are identified by autism class teachers.
- Social stories are used to prepare the children for inclusion.
- The autism class teacher, mainstream class teacher and parents/guardians will create an Inclusion Goal Support Plan for each child. (See appendix 2).
- The Inclusion Goal Support Plan for each child will be agreed and signed by the class teachers and parents. (See appendix 2).
- Where a pupil experiences significant difficulty participating in mainstream provision despite appropriate supports and adaptations, class teachers will review and implement reasonable environmental adjustments and targeted supports. Where these measures do not achieve their intended outcomes, it may be necessary to implement planned and time-limited modifications to the



pupil's timetable or level of participation. Such adjustments are intended to provide targeted support to develop the skills and regulation supports required for sustained and meaningful mainstream participation.

- In line with guidance from the National Council for Special Education, which states that placement should be “needs-based, flexible and regularly reviewed,” any adjustment to participation will be documented within the pupil’s Inclusion/Support Plan and will be subject to ongoing review.
- Consistent with the principle that pupils should be educated in the least restrictive and most appropriate environment, the objective of any temporary adjustment is to progressively increase meaningful participation and support full engagement where appropriate.
- The process remains open to continuous review to ensure decisions are proportionate, evidence-informed and aligned with the pupil’s educational needs and wellbeing.

The following suggestions may be used to support the inclusion of the children as they transition through their time in the school. These suggestions are intended to support familiarity with new teachers and classrooms and the regulation of the children.

- Movement breaks – when the child is on movement breaks around school, pass their mainstream classroom and bring attention to the classroom door
- Visit empty classroom- allow the child to explore his/her empty mainstream classroom (mainstream class at P.E. etc). walk around classroom.
- Photograph of mainstream teacher- teaching mainstream teacher’s name and matching it to their picture.
- Mainstream teachers’ picture on classroom door- child matches picture to picture during movement breaks /transitions around school.
- Child greets mainstream teacher during yard time- explicit teaching of greetings takes place in class first at child’s own level, eg greet the teacher on yard when prompted by teacher/SNA to do so.
- Greets teacher on yard- prompted by SNA to walk up to and greets mainstream teacher independently.
- 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
- Begin planning with mainstream teacher for commencement of mainstream inclusion lessons, usually beginning with non-academic lessons e.g. Golden Time, Aistear, Yard games. Time spent in mainstream will depend on the needs and abilities of each individual child.
- When deemed appropriate, teachers can begin planning for inclusion of more traditional academic lessons.
- Adult support for inclusion in lessons may be adjusted in response to the child’s needs e.g. SNA will support for safe transition to and from mainstream class but adult does not remain with child during mainstream lessons.
- Regular communication between mainstream and autism class teachers is essential to ensure successful implementation of each child’s individual mainstream inclusion objectives.

Reverse inclusion:

The school operates a policy of reverse inclusion, and this extends to all classes, as the inclusion of mainstream class students into the autism class has benefits for all children. Students may visit for structured play, activity work in groups or as individuals and for social skills lessons. The autism class and mainstream class teachers will collaborate to provide reverse inclusion where appropriate.



Social stories may be used to prepare the children, by explaining what is going to happen and communicating expectations. Lessons and activities are prepped in advance of reverse inclusion.

Staff Collaboration:

- Time will be made available at the start of the academic year to facilitate the mainstream class teacher observing the children in their classroom and to collaborate with the class teacher to plan for inclusion.
- In the event of the mainstream teacher being absent, every effort will be made to provide advance notification to prepare the children for a change to their schedule.
- Advance notification will be given for changes to the mainstream timetable, as it is important that the children follow a regular schedule and inclusion takes place as planned.
- Teachers will plan together for inclusion and review on a regular basis.

Promoting Awareness, Understanding and Inclusion:

- Awareness and understanding of diversity, additional needs and individual differences will be promoted across the school community in the following ways:
- Recognition of awareness days and themed events that promote understanding and acceptance of difference, eg Autism Awareness Month (April) and World Autism Awareness day (April 2nd)
- Explicit teaching about diversity, inclusion, empathy and respect through age-appropriate resources, collaboration between staff, and access to educational materials. (see appendices 3 + 4 for autism specific resources)
- Opportunities for collaboration between classes to promote positive peer relationships and shared learning experiences.
- Supporting initiatives, partnerships or fundraising that enhance inclusion and strengthen understanding of additional needs.
- Structured opportunities for interaction and shared activities between special classes and mainstream classes where appropriate (“reverse inclusion”), to promote belonging and mutual understanding.

Staff Development:

Stratford NS is committed to ongoing professional learning to support the effective implementation of inclusive practice across the school. Structured and relevant continuing professional development (CPD) will be prioritised to ensure staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and competencies required to meet the diverse needs of pupils.

Professional learning may include whole-school training, collaborative planning, mentoring and engagement with external expertise where appropriate. The school will avail of guidance, training and advisory support from relevant bodies, including the National Council for Special Education, as well as other suitably qualified professionals.

Staff development will focus on areas such as differentiation, universal design for learning, regulation and wellbeing, positive behaviour supports, and inclusive classroom practice. The impact of professional learning will be reflected in whole-school planning, classroom practice and ongoing review of provision.

Assessment:

Assessment by observation and testing will be conducted by the class teacher(s) covering 3 aspects of development

- Social Inclusion
- Language and Communication



- Play and Behaviour

Home – School Liaison:

Parents will be informed of any inclusion that their child partakes in on a regular basis and will collaborate with autism and mainstream class teachers to create the Inclusion Goal Support Plan (Appendix 2).

Review:

This policy will be reviewed in 2029 as more information on techniques to ensure effective inclusion becomes available.

Signed: Maire Kenny
Chairperson

Date: 19th May 2026

Signed: Bayl Healy
Principal

Date: 25/5/26



Appendix 1: Inclusion Timetable

Student: _____
 Inclusion Class: _____
 Date: _____
 Autism Class Teacher: _____
 Mainstream Class Teacher: _____
 Review Date: _____

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9.30					
9.45					
10.00					
10.15					
10.30					
10.40					
11.00					
11.45					
12.00					
12.15					
12.30					
12.45					
1.30					
1.45					
2.00					
2.15					
2.30					
2.45					

(R) Denotes REVERSE INCLUSION



Appendix 2: Inclusion Goal Support Plan

Student: _____

Autism Class Teacher: _____

Inclusion Class: _____

Mainstream Class Teacher: _____

Date: _____

Review Date: _____

Goals of Inclusion	
Social Goals Of Inclusion	
Academic Goals Of Inclusion	
Proposed Inclusion for academic Year	
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	

Teacher signatures : _____

SNA signature: _____

Parent signature: _____

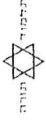


Review	
Date of Review	
Social Goals Of Inclusion	
Academic Goals Of Inclusion	
Are any changes to the inclusion process required/ recommended?	
Additional Comments	

Teacher signatures : _____

SNA signature: _____

Parent signature: _____



Appendix 3 : Books and Videos

Title	Author	Video Link
Andy and His Yellow Frisbee (age 5-8)	Mary Thompson	https://youtu.be/BPmcZ_0OKYI?si=KOp6EhRSm5eQGkwI
All My Stripes: A Story for Children with Autism (age 6+)	Shaina Rudolph and Danielle Royer	https://youtu.be/5gaLxpifMcQ?si=AVjX3b6g1cDfkc_S
The Autism Acceptance Book: Being a Friend to Someone with Autism (ages 6+)	Ellen Sabin	
Ethan's Story; My Life with Autism (ages 8-12)	Ethan Rice	
What it is to Be Me! (ages 4+)	Angela Wine	
My Friend with Autism (ages 4+)	Beverly Bishop	https://youtu.be/Bg2RaNFn9s0?si=cDA19ineEXICHPUj
Different Like Me: My Book of Autism Heroes (ages 8-12)	Jennifer Elder	
I See Things Differently: A First Look at Autism (ages 4+)	Pat Thomas	https://youtu.be/-KeTk6iWwGg?si=98fmdGg9UH845klh
Nathan's Autism Spectrum Superpowers (ages 5+)	Lori Yarborough	https://youtu.be/3dVvycr_2fc?si=jw3QvhEH84JB0IXV
A Friend Like Simon	Kate Gaynor	https://youtu.be/DHs-PTWl_nl?si=jgexJ0NL-1AqUq4
Pablo and the Noisy Party	Andrew Brenner and Sumita Majumdar	https://youtu.be/ciYvDx9-Yg4?si=omTWHYqGYlb_KvJR
A Day with No Words	Tiffany Hammond	https://youtu.be/4kHWFV7miY?si=1AMmpH3w6JfVIIG3

Additional recommendations: <https://www.independent.ie/entertainment/books/ten-childrens-books-for-autism-acceptance-month/42432632.html>? (free account needed)



Appendix 4: Additional Sources of Resources and Training

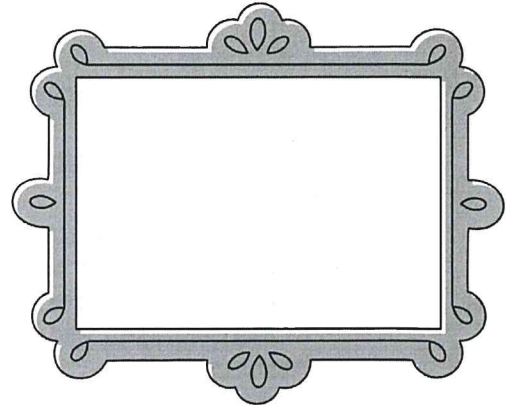
- AsIAM resources
 - <https://asiam.ie/advice-guidance/resource-library#Educational-Resource>
- Autism Level Up
 - <https://www.autismlevelup.com/>
- NCSE
 - <https://ncse.ie/all-online-resources>
- Autism Resource Pack for Schools
 - https://www.mwcds.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Information_Avista-CDNTs-Autism-resource-pack-for-schools-Final.pdf
- Autism Toolbox UK
 - <https://www.autismtoolbox.co.uk/>
- Middletown Autism
 - <https://www.middletownautism.com/>
- NCSE
 - <https://ncse.ie/tpl>
- Little Puddins
 - <https://www.littlepuddins.ie/>



All About Me

#707c4c

My name is:



I like:

I don't like:

I communicate by:

- Speaking
- Sign Language
- Communication
- Device
- Gestures

I'm really good at:

I need help with:

Things That Help Me Feel Calm:

I wish my teacher would:



Getting To Know Me

What do I really love?

What do I like about school?

What activities do I enjoy at school?

What do I like about break time?

What activities do I enjoy at home?

What do I like about yard?

What makes learning easier for me?

Something you should know about me...

I like to show what I have learned by...

The Understanding Element



Getting To Know Me

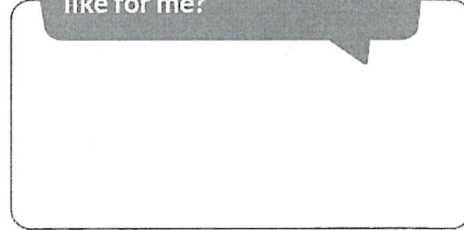
Things that I like (in school/outside school):

What are break times like for me?



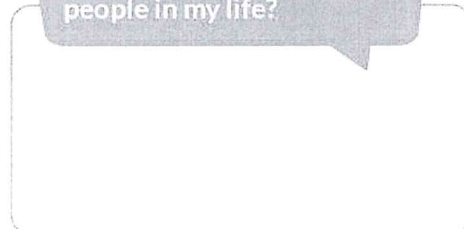
My favourite part of the school day is:

What is class changeover like for me?



My favourite subjects are:

Who are the important people in my life?



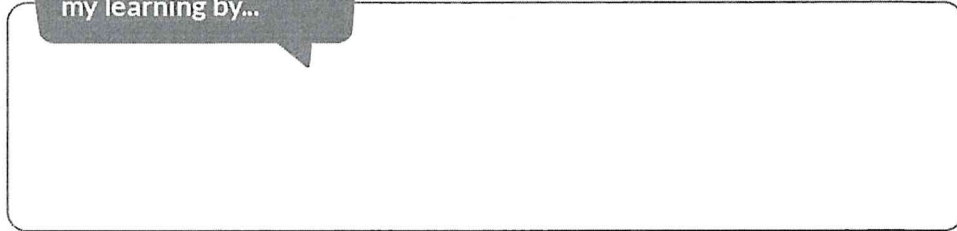
What makes learning easier for me?



Something I would like you to know about me..



I prefer to show my learning by...





My Thoughts About School



Name: _____ Date: _____

The things I like best at school are:

The things I find hard are:

I am happy in class when:

My favourite school memory:

My least favourite school memory:

I need help with:

My teachers in school can help me by:

