St. Joseph's Patrician College

The BISH

Autism Policy

Ratification Date:

Revision Number	Date	Approved by BOM
1	10th Feb 2026	10th Feb 2026
2		
3		

Next Review Date: December 2026

This procedure complies with the Child Protection Procedures as adopted by the Board of Management. Teachers are reminded that they are mandated persons and must be familiar with their obligations under the *Children First: National Guidance for Protection and Welfare of Children 2017 and the Children First Act 2015*

1. Introduction and Purpose

St Joseph's Patrician College is committed to providing an inclusive, respectful, and student-centred educational environment for autistic learners. This policy outlines how the school supports the academic, social, emotional, sensory, and communication needs of students with Autism, including those educated in
(a) Special Classes and
(b) mainstream settings with additional supports.
This updated policy (2025) replaces the ASD Policy ratified in 2021 and aligns with current Department of Education guidelines, NCSE practice, and all relevant Irish legislation.
In keeping with the school ethos, *"Love God, work hard, and take care of one another,"* St Joseph's Patrician College recognises neurodiversity as part of human diversity and aims to support all autistic students in achieving personal excellence, independence, and wellbeing.

2. Legal and Policy Framework

This policy is guided by national legislation, statutory guidance, best practice, and educational frameworks including:

- Education Act 1998
- Education (Welfare) Act 2000
- Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004
- Admissions to Schools Act 2018
- Equal Status Acts 2000–2018
- Disability Act 2005
- Children First Act 2015 and Children First: National Guidance (2017)
- Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2017)
- Department of Education Guidelines for Autism Special Classes (updated annually)
- NCSE Good Practice Guidelines for Autism (2016–2024)
- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (ratified 2018)

This policy should be read alongside:

- St Joseph's Patrician College Admission Policy
- Code of Responsibility and Behaviour
- SEN Policy
- Health and Safety Statement
- Data Protection Policy

Available on www.bish.ie

3. Policy Principles

St Joseph's Patrician College:

- Recognises Autism as a difference, not a deficit
- Promotes inclusive education with appropriate planning
- Protects dignity and confidentiality
- Uses evidence-based educational approaches
- Values student voice and self-advocacy
- Works in meaningful partnership with parents/guardians
- Supports staff training and professional learning

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4. Autism Provision in the School

4.1 Special Classes for Autism

The school operates Autism Special Classes (maximum enrolment: 6 students per class, subject to NCSE allocation). Placement is subject to a diagnosis of Autism and a recommendation for Special Class education from a suitably qualified professional, in line with NCSE guidelines.

4.2 Mainstream with Additional Support

Autistic students are supported within mainstream through the Continuum of Support, including:

- Differentiated instruction
- Resource teaching
- Co-teaching and SNA support
- Sensory breaks
- Reduced timetables (where appropriate)

4.3 Flexible Options

Where relevant, individual students may access:

- Sensory spaces
- Quiet / low-stimulus environments
- Structured life-skills programmes
- Assistive technology
- Alternative Augmentative Communication (AAC)

Placement decisions are reviewed annually in the best interests of the student.

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5. Identification, Assessment & Referral

- A diagnostic report from a clinical psychologist, psychiatrist, paediatrician, or multidisciplinary team is required for Special Class placement (DSM-5 or ICD-10 criteria).
- The school may request supporting reports (SLT, OT, NEPS, CAMHS) if appropriate.
- The school collaborates closely with the SENCO, NCSE SENO, and NEPS psychologist.

No student will be placed in a Special Class without a current diagnostic report, consistent with NCSE Special Class Guidelines and DES requirements.

6. Personalised Support Planning

Every autistic learner will have:

- **Student Support File (SSF)** - following NEPS Continuum of Support
- **Personal Pupil Plan (PPP)** - where SNA access is assigned
- **PLP / IEP** - where appropriate, detailing goals and supports

Targets may include:

- Social skills
- Sensory regulation
- Organisation, study skills, and independence
- Communication strategies
- Attendance and wellbeing

Review meetings occur once per year with parents, SEN staff, and relevant teachers, along with 2 reports.

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7. Teaching and Learning Approaches

Evidence-based and Neuro-affirmative supports include:

- TEACCH structured teaching approaches *(note this approach historically has been behavioural which is not considered neuro-affirmative but can be modified to be neuro-affirmative i.e., not rewards based, not distressing and increased opportunities for communication)*
- Visual schedules and supports
- Social narratives and social communication programmes
- Explicit instruction for routines and expectations
- Sensory regulation strategies
- Assistive technology and digital literacy programmes
- Reasonable accommodations for assessment

The school maintains a calm, predictable environment to minimise anxiety and maximise participation.

7.2 L2LP (Level 2 Learning Programmes)

For those students who currently can’t access the existing Junior Cycle at Level 3.

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8. Sensory & Environmental Supports

The school strives to provide:

- A sensory-friendly Autism Centre
- Access to quiet space during unstructured times
- Movement breaks and flexible seating
- Sensory equipment where appropriate

Note: Sensory integration equipment and therapeutic supports are subject to NCSE/HSE allocation.

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9. Communication, Social Development & Life Skills

Students are supported through:

- Life skills programmes (time management, money handling, following instructions)
- RSE and social development supports, using external specialist agencies where appropriate
- Structured opportunities for peer interaction
- Optional participation - not mandatory - in social programmes

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10. Staff Training, Roles & Responsibilities

The school supports ongoing professional learning in:

- Autism awareness
- Sensory needs
- Trauma-informed practice
- Positive Behaviour Support (PBS)
- Assistive technology

Training sources include NCSE, NEPS, Middletown Centre for Autism, and recognised NGOs.

Additional trainings include

- Low Arousal Approach
- Collaborative and Proactive Solutions (CPS) – Lives in the Balance (https://livesinthebalance.org/)
- Autism Level UP (https://www.autismlevelup.com/)
- As I am (https://asiam.ie/what-we-do/training-accreditation)
- Middletown Centre for Autism (https://www.middletownautism.com/)
- Enable Ireland Neurodiversity Series (**Link to playlist**)

Key Roles Include:

- **Board of Management** - policy ratification and resource approval
- **Principal** - overall management of Autism provision
- **SEN Co-ordinator (SENCO)** - planning, referrals, and support allocation
- **Autism class teachers** - day-to-day learner support
- **SNAs** - care needs and independence skill development (following Circular 0030/2014)
- **Guidance Counsellor(s)** - emotional wellbeing and transitions

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11. Transitions from Primary to Post-Primary

A structured transition programme exists, including meetings with parents, primary SEN teams, classroom visits, and gradual induction.

Transition planning begins at least one year before school completion and may include:

- HSE Autism services
- Visits to FE colleges / training centres
- Travel training
- Application support for services and FE places

11.2 Transitioning students to second level

Step 1	On receipt of an offer, parents/guardians will fill in an acceptance form for their child to attend the Autism Class at St. Joseph's Patrician College
Step 2	The Autism support staff will contact the parents/guardians.
Step 3	A formal meeting takes place with the parents/guardians, primary school support team and staff form St Joseph's Patrician College.
Step 4	Contact will be made with the primary school and parent/guardians to invite the student to begin a transition programme in St. Joseph's Patrician College. The programme and content will depend on the student's individual needs.
Step 5	Potential students will be visited by a member of the Autism team to observe the student in their existing placement if the child is in a special school, to prepare for their transition to St. Joseph's Patrician College.
Step 6	Students will be invited into the school to meet with the class teacher and observe the break-time schedule and change of class environment.
Step 7	As with all 1st year students there will be a general collective information evening for parents/guardians in May before they start in the school.
Step 8	When the student starts in St. Joseph's Patrician College the student follows a specific schedule set up by the specialist Autism staff, considering all the information gathered in the above processes. This schedule is sampled for an initial induction period.
Step 9	Following the induction period, the student schedule is modified as required.

11.3 Transitioning Students to Third Level and further placements

Step 1	In the year prior to leaving school, discussions will take place with the Autism services section in the HSE.
Step 2	The SEN Team will contact the parents/guardians and discuss what they hope to achieve for their children.
Step 3	Investigations will be made by the SEN Team and visits to suitable locations will be arranged. The SEN Team will make the first visit, (where possible) and hold a transition meeting with the new facility.
Step 4	In the final year of school, where required, assistance will be given to the students on completing forms for the new facility and support will be given to aid the transition.
Step 5	Students will be assisted in practicing travel runs (where possible) to ensure the students are comfortable with the journey they must make.
Step 6	Students will be supported during social classes and the impending transition will be discussed regularly.

12. Behaviour & Wellbeing

- Behaviour is understood as communication.
- PBS (Positive Behaviour Support) is used rather than punitive approaches.
- Restrictive practices are not permitted except in line with DES guidelines and child safeguarding legislation.
- No disciplinary measure will discriminate on the grounds of disability.

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13. Data Protection & Confidentiality

- All student data is stored and processed in line with GDPR and Data Protection guidelines.
- Student information is shared only with relevant staff and services, with parental consent unless mandated by law.

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14. Partnership with Parents / Guardians

The school commits to:

- Regular review meetings
- Transparent communication
- Shared decision-making
- Parent access to support materials, reports, and planning documents

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15. Review, Monitoring & Evaluation

- This Autism Policy is reviewed annually by the BOM, Care Team, SENCO and Autism team.
- Updated versions will be presented to the Board of Management for ratification.
- Next review date: **December 2026** or earlier if legislative changes are introduced.

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16. Appendices (suggested updates)

The following appendices from the 2021 policy remain relevant and will be updated:

- Appendix 1 – Role of an SNA (Circular 0030/2014)
- Appendix 2 – Supporting Autistic Pupils
- Appendix 3 – Teaching & Learning Tips
- Appendix 4 – Staff assigned to Autism Centre (updated annually)
- Appendix 5 – Map of Autism Centre
- Appendix 6 – Sample Student Support File (SSF)
- Appendix 7 – Sample Personal Pupil Plan (PPP)

Appendix 1

The Duties of the SNAs are set out in Circular SNA 12/05.
From an Autism perspective here are some points regarding the role that the SNA can play:

- The child must feel comfortable and safe in their school environment, and with the challenges that school brings and the anxiety so often associated with Autistic people this is of major importance. SNAs are someone who an Autistic child can feel comfortable with and develop a bond with overtime.

- Autistic children may need space and often find it very difficult to cope if someone overcrowds them. Therefore, the SNA has a difficult task, which will vary from child to child, in establishing the balance between supporting them in their work and allowing them space.

- The SNA is someone who can really focus on the specific challenges of an Autistic child. The SNA overtime can learn what the child is able to cope with and what stresses them out. This is of major importance as it means that there is someone in the classroom who understands where an Autistic child may be majorly anxious or at risk of getting very angry or upset. It also means there is someone there who can ensure that an Autistic child is not put into a situation which they find particularly hard to cope with.

- The SNA plays an important role in enabling an Autistic child to become more independent. Establishing the balance between gently pushing them on and considering their limits, once the Autistic child gets to know an SNA and trust that they will be there if things get too much for them, it can really boost their confidence.

- The SNA can play a great role in gently challenging an Autistic child. Head-on confrontation will rarely work with an Autistic child, more likely it will result in a major meltdown or negative behaviour. The SNA is someone who can withdraw a child from a circumstance and allow the issue to be addressed at a later stage when they have calmed down.

- The SNA can be a great support in helping an Autistic child to socialise, encouraging them to engage with other children in the class as much as they are able or can tolerate. Equally, they can play a great role in ensuring other children are kind and inclusive of the child.

- SNAs play a major role in ensuring that an Autistic child gets the maximum out of class time and concentrates and applies themselves to a task as much as they can. SNAs can help the child to stay focused and make sure that the child does not miss out on anything the teacher says due to distraction, problems with following instruction or in grasping what they are being asked to do.

- As the SNA is someone who an Autistic child generally grows to trust the SNA can be a kind, but firm voice who can help the child to realise what behaviours are acceptable or unacceptable in the school setting.

Appendix 2

Supporting Autistic Pupils

“Autism is a lifelong developmental disability or difference which relates to how a person communicates and interacts with others, and how they experience the world around them.

Autism is a part of the broader neurodiversity family of differences or disabilities which includes people with conditions or differences such as ADHD, Dyslexia and Dyspraxia, Epilepsy, Tourette’s Syndrome and Dyscalculia. People who have these differences are said to be neurodivergent. Their way of thinking and processing the world can diverge from what society expects, whereas people who don't have these differences are said to be neurotypical. These different ways of thinking about, processing and understanding the world are called neurotypes.

Autism exists on a spectrum, which means it affects people in different ways, at different times, in different situations. Differences typically show up in the following areas:

- Communication
- Social interaction
- Repetitive and restrictive patterns of behaviour
- Sensory processing

While thinking in a different way from the majority of people can make some aspects of life more challenging, it is not an inherently negative thing. There are many strengths associated with Autism, such as the ability to focus on detail and a strong sense of honesty. Autistic people can excel in areas they are interested in. It does not have to limit a person's future. Around 3.3% of the Irish population are Autistic. As I Am is committed to building a society that works for Autistic people and empowering them to fulfil their potential.”

(As I Am, 2026 - https://asiam.ie/advice-guidance/what-is-autism).

Autistic people may communicate differently.

Some may speak or may be non-speaking or use Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC).

Communication differences may include a delay in the development of language, comprehension and expressive language differences, literal thinking, different use of intonation and delivery of speech, echolalia (echoing speech and language) and differences in interpreting social cues, body language, tone of voice and facial expressions.

Strategies for Impairments in Language and Communication

- Students require support in understanding and using language.
- Opportunities will be provided for students to learn 'social' aspects of communication, such as turn taking and timing (some turn taking activities may include board games, hitting a balloon back and forth, telephone conversations, bouncing a ball back and forth, etc). Interest based activities will be provided to help students build friendships and develop their communication skills.
- Use visual material and/or signing to support and facilitate students' communication.
- Provide precise instructions for students to follow with visual supports.
- Always refer to the student by name as he/she may not realise that 'everyone' includes them.
- Do not expect eye contact and never turn the student's face towards you.
- Keep verbal instructions brief and simple. Repeat and use visuals and /or the student's preferred mode of communication e.g., AAC.

Social Interaction

Autistic people have different communication skills, styles and preferences. For example, many prefer to connect with others over a shared interest. The goal of communication support is to remove barriers and provide opportunities for Autistic students to participate fully in school, depending on their individual profile and support needs. Interventions to teach social skills can lead to 'masking' which can cause considerable stress and anxiety for Autistic students.

The following may help promote communication and interaction in a classroom setting:

- Accept all forms of communication as valid
- Provide opportunities for spending time with peers who have similar interests
- Establish a predictable class expectation
- Ensuring the environment is supportive of individual sensory needs
- Provide structure for opportunities for students to use socialise in different situations.
- Be aware of the difficulties for student's inherent in less structured situations such as break, lunchtime, in the corridor and in transitions between lessons.
- Use social stories show students what to expect in a given situation to help make it more predictable and reduce any anxiety about it.
- Develop a 'Buddy system' with mainstream peers.
- When appropriate, directly teach figurative language e.g., jokes, puns and metaphors.

Participation
Autistic students will need support to participate in class/ school activities.

Strategies for this will include:

- Prepare student for the activity using visuals supports such as destination cards, visual schedules, social stories, videos.
- Provide students with activities / objects that will help them regulate their nervous system.
- Provide students with access to items to reduce environmental impact, e.g., ear defenders for those with noise and sound sensitivities.
- Help students develop their ability to self-advocate for what they need to regulate.
- Provide them with opportunities to try new and/or varying activities.
- Provide students with 'choice' when offering activities.
- Pre-empt the student's anxiety that results from being presented with unstructured or unfamiliar situations without prior warning / explanation and have materials available to them that can help them calm and regulate, e.g., a sensory space / quiet, dark space to reduce load on their sensory system, sensory toys.
- Devise and implement a structured play/leisure programme

In relation to a lack of flexibility of thinking and behaviour, one may notice that the child has limited social imagination, becomes anxious with changes in routine, prefers restricted and/or repetitive activities and routines, and is obsessional with a narrow range of interests. These difficulties can also be reflected in problems with imaginative play and with sharing the attention with others.

Therefore, difficulty with participating in the activities or enjoyment of others is a particular challenge to teachers as it affects the student's ability to share and have varied interests, adapt behaviour according to the situation, accept changes in rules and routines, accept others' points of view, and generalise learning.

Strategies for Impairments in Imagination with a Restricted Range of Behaviours, Activities and Interests:

- Student's must be helped to cope with new and/or varying activities.
- Pre-empt the student's anxiety that results from being presented with unstructured or unfamiliar situations without prior warning/explanation.
- Devise and implement a structured play/leisure programme

Appendix 3

Additional Tips for Learning and Teaching

- Adjustments may need to be made to the classroom to address the students under sensitivity / oversensitivity to noise, smell, taste, light, touch or movement.
- Consider implementing structured and systematic programmes to develop the student's fine and/or gross-motor skills.
- Seek relevant information regarding the students' eating, drinking and sleeping patterns from them / their caregivers. Support as appropriate, e.g., accepting their food and drink preferences.
- Create an Autism friendly school/classroom environment.
- Structure the classroom environment to reduce distractions.
- Build in regular breaks from the start of the school day, at regular intervals, continued throughout the day to help students regulate.
- Ensure you have the students' attention prior to issuing instructions / engaging in conversation.
- Provide structures that assist students in understanding the duration of tasks.
- Make the links between different tasks clear to students.
- Use computers to support the student's learning and teaching opportunities.
- For any behaviours of concern, focus on supporting the student and understanding why a behaviour may have occurred.

Supporting Students with Autism in Schools

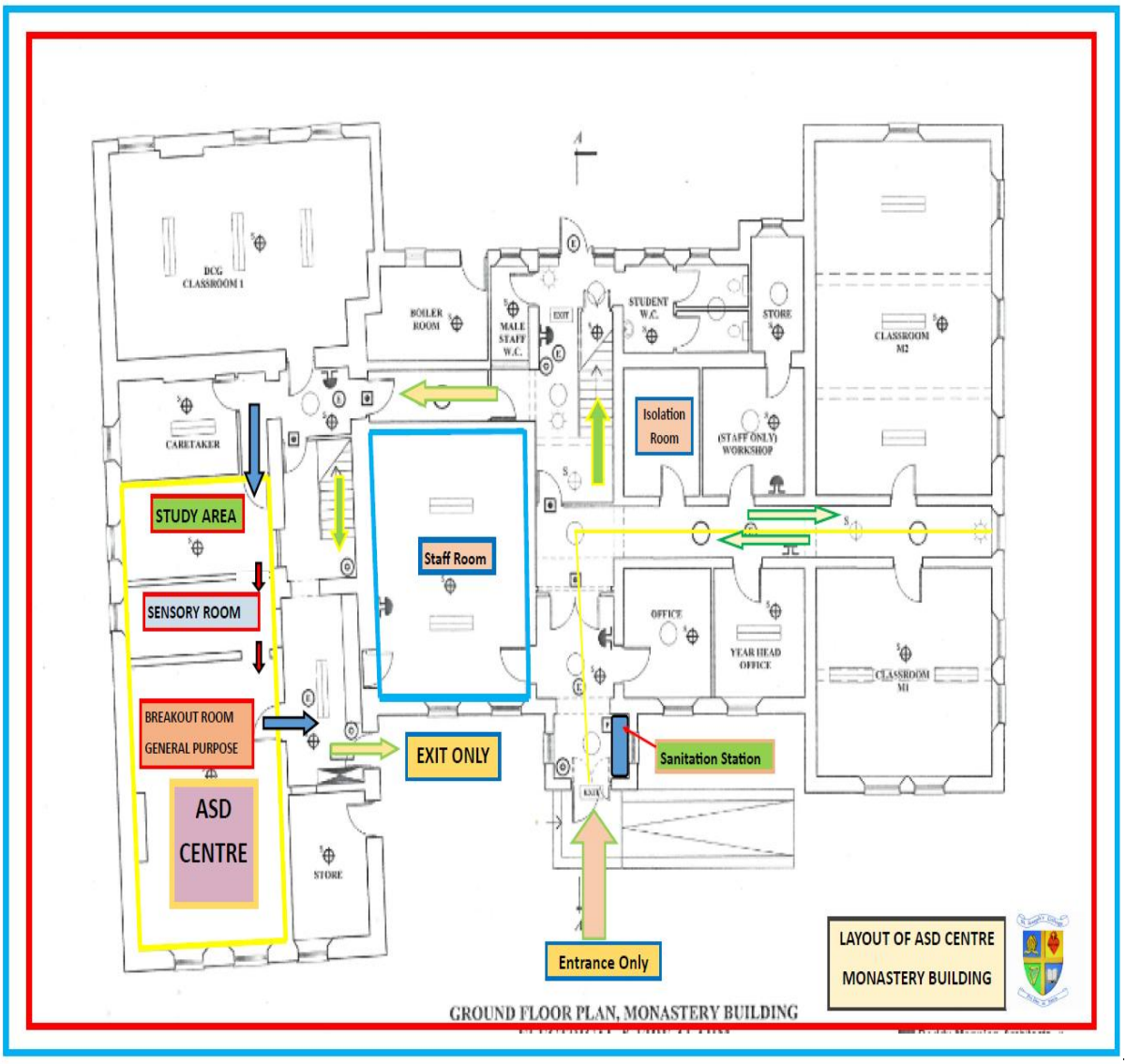
Appendix 4

Staff Members assigned to the AS Centre - School Year 2025/2026.

Kathleen Devine	Co-Ordinator & Teacher
Darach Behan	SNA
Aoife Mulvey	SNA
Miriam Munoz	SNA
Katie Coughlan	SNA
Fiona Haverty	SNA
Nuala O'Halloran	Teacher
Elaine Dobbyn	Teacher
Rob Leonard	Teacher
Michael Quain	Teacher
Alan Glynn	Teacher
Amy Considine	Teacher
Alwyn Revill	Teacher
Kate O'Regan	Teacher
Dympna Page	Teacher
Darragh Loughnane	Teacher

Appendix 5

Map of Autism Centre



Appendix 6

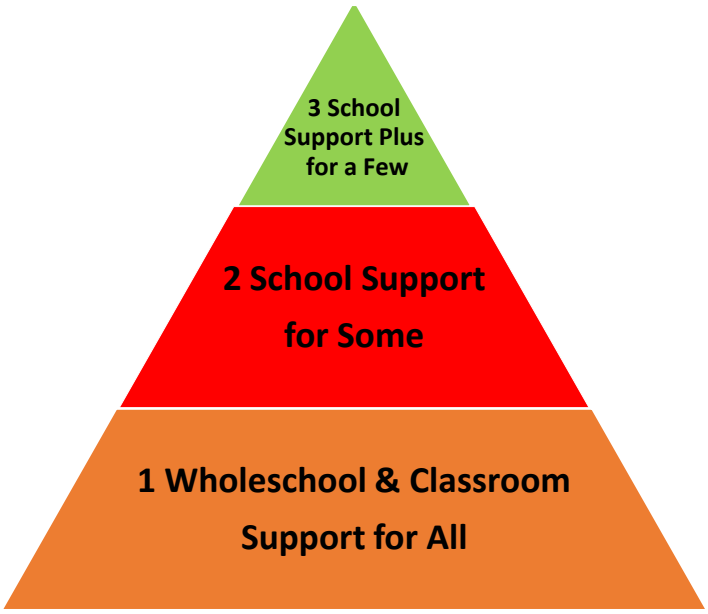
Sample Student Support File (SSF)

STUDENT SUPPORT FILE

STUDENT SUPPORT FILE	
Name of Student	
Date of Birth	
School	**St Joseph's Patrician College**
Date File Opened	
Date File Closed	

A Continuum of Support

ACADEMIC SUCCESS ⟺ **SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL & BEHAVIOURAL COMPETENCE**



Developing a student support plan is the outcome of a problem solving process, involving school staff, parent(s)/ guardian(s) and the student. We start by identifying concerns, we gather information, we put together a plan and we review it.

Student Support File, Log of Actions

St. Joseph's Patrician College.

Date	Actions

St. Joseph's Patrician College Support Checklist

Name:	**Age:**	**Class:**
General Information	**Date Checked**	**Comments**
1. Parents/ Guardians Consulted		
2. Information from previous school/preschool gathered		
3. Hearing		
4. Vision		
5. Medical Needs		
6. Basic Needs Checklist completed		
7. Assessment of learning- screening		
8. Observation of learning style/approach to learning		
9. Observation of behaviour		
10. Interview with pupil		
11. Classroom work differentiated?		
12. Learning environment adapted?		
13. Yard/school environments adapted?		
14. Informal or formal consultation/advice with outside professionals?		
15. Advice given by learning support/resource teacher or other school staff?		
16. Other interventions put in place in school?		
Action needed		

Helpful references: SEN: A Continuum of Support: Resource Pack for Teachers, pp. 13-16, 18 to 20; BESD: A Continuum of Support, p 7; A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools, Resource Pack for Teachers, pp32-36; Student Support Teams in Post-Primary Schools, pp20

St. Joseph's Patrician College SEN Profile

Name:	Class:
Profile:	
Strengths:	Learning Needs:
Targets:	Other:

ST JOSEPH'S PATRICIAN COLLEGE SUPPORT PLAN

Classroom Support
School Support (Support for SOME)
School Support Plus (Support for A FEW)

To be completed by the teacher(s).

For help, see *SEN: A Continuum of Support - Guidelines for Teachers: BESD: A Continuum of Support – Guidelines for Teachers* pp.71-74*; A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools, Resource Pack for Teachers,* pp. 51, 53, 54, 57.

Student's name		Age	
Lead teacher		Class/year	
Start date of plan			
Review date of plan			
Student's strengths and interests			
Priority concerns			
Possible reasons for concerns			
Targets for the student (Including possible TY and LC curriculum)			
Strategies to help the student achieve the targets			
Staff involved and resources needed			
Signature of parent(s)/ guardian(s)			
Signature of teacher			

ST. JOSEPH'S PATRICIAN COLLEGE SUPPORT REVIEW RECORD*

Classroom Support
School Support (Support for SOME)
School Support Plus (Support for A FEW)

To be completed by the teacher(s) as a review of the plan and as a guide for future actions.

For help, see *SEN: A Continuum of Support - Guidelines for Teachers; BESD: A Continuum of Support – Guidelines for Teachers; A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools, Resource pack for Teachers; Student Support Teams in Post-Primary Schools.*

Student's name	Class/ Year	
Names of those present at review	Date of Review	
What areas of the plan have been most successful and why?		
Since the start of the plan, has anything changed in relation to the original concerns? If so, what are these changes, and what have we learned from them?		
Have the student's needs changed since the start of the plan, and if so how?		
Recommended future actions – *what, how, who, when?*		
Any comments from the student?		
Any comments from the parent(s)/guardian(s comment?		
Signature of parent(s)/ guardian(s)		
Signature of teacher(s)		

Outcome of review (tick as appropriate)			
	Revert to previous level of support- Support for All/ Classroom Support OR Support for Some/ School Support		Progress to next level of support- Support for Some/ School Support OR Support for a Few/ School Support Plus
	Continue at Current Level of Support		Request consultation with other professionals

*A consultation with a NEPS psychologist/ other professionals may contribute to this review.

Appendix 7

Sample Personal Pupil Plan (PPP)

St. Joseph's College, Galway

Name:

Date of Birth:

Class: **SENCO:**

Year Head: **SNA:**

Resource Teaching Hours: **DES Category of Disability:** SEE BELOW

Pupil's Identified Care Needs: (in line with DES Circular 0030/2014)
Timeframe for which care support is expected to be required:

Targets :

Identify targets to reduce/eliminate dependence on care support:

Long Term:	
Shorter Term:	

Programmes/Strategies that will be employed to achieve short term targets listed above

Key: SENCO = Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator, CT = Class Teacher, PT = Parent, P = Pupil, ISA = Inclusion Support Assistant, SET = Special Education Teacher

Programmes/Strategies	Personnel (see above key)	Indicate Frequency Daily	Timeframe of programme e.g:	Review Date & one of:
		Once / week Twice / week As required	3 months, 6 months, 9 months.	O = Ongoing D = Diminished A = Achieved
Detail on plan to reduce dependence on ISA for each of the above: Programmes should increase skillset with regard to independence and functional living and eventually reduce the dependence as much as is possible on SNA support. Prefects encouraged to volunteer to help with the extracurricular activities thus decreasing the dependence on SNA support in that area. As CAMHS continue to support the child the dependence on SNA should also decrease. However, with Autism it takes time and patience and resilience to make steady progress.				

SNA Care Timetable

Times	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	On - Call

SIGNED:

Class Teacher :

_____

Resource Teachers : <u>See timetable attached</u>

SNA :

Parent/Guardian:

Student (if appropriate):

SENCO:

Date:

Sample Frequency Chart

Week : _____ Initials: _____

Care/Behavioural Need	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri
Pupil needed to be removed from classroom for significantly disruptive behaviour					
Pupil physically hurt self/another pupil					