**School Policy on the Integration and Inclusion of Special Needs Children into Mainstream Classes**

**Introduction**: The need for a policy on inclusion was developed a need to have a whole school approach to the issue of integration for all staff. Our school recognises its role in serving the community and are committee to the rights of pupils with needs to receive an inclusive education. As we now have two ASD classes in our school, our aim is to have a model of good practice for inclusion that will be of benefit to all pupils both mainstream and special needs.

**Rationale**: The policy was formulated so that:

* teaching staff have clear well defined guidelines on best practice
* there is consistency throughout the school
* optimum learning experiences are provided for all the children

**Aims**:

* to provide a teaching and learning experience that enables pupils with Special Needs become exposed to learning in a mainstream setting
* to enable mainstream children observe at close quarters, the special needs of some children in society
* to develop the social skills and self esteem of the Special Needs child
* To embed the “Inclusive Education Framework” Guidelines into our school practice.

**Roles**:

**Principal:**

* responsibility for co-ordinating an effective whole school approach to integration/inclusion and promoting a positive school environment where pupils with special needs feel welcome, secure and valued and where accommodations can be negotiated to respond to individualised social and educational needs.
* responsibility for the provision of in service training and adequate resourcing within the classroom to support classroom management and organisation, visual and material support resources within the parameters of resources available.
* monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of the policy and making relevant adjustment following consultation
* working with parents and out of school agencies and professionals so that best practice can be adjusted according to the needs of pupils.

**Special Class Teachers**:

The Special Class teachers will:

* Identify the appropriate curriculum area the Special Needs child should experience
* Ensure S.N.A support is available for pupils during integration
* Collaborate and consult with mainstream class teachers in setting realistic targets and provide adequate notice to mainstream teachers to allow them to plan accordingly.
* Assume responsibility for an ongoing individual education plan in consultation with support services and parents.

**Class Teachers**:

The mainstream class teachers will:

* Adjust programmes to allow the Special Class pupil to access the curriculum in a meaningful manner.
* Ensure the pupils well being and engagement are prioritised
* Collaborate with the Special Class teacher, class teacher, the S.N.A on goals, priorities,action plan and feedback to assess the effectiveness of the plan.

**Implementation:**

The school promotes a policy of integration with age appropriate peers on a social level and ability appropriate on a curriculum level.

For integration/inclusion to be effective it must

* further develop social skills and reinforce the self esteem of the special needs child
* not interfere with the level of learning within each class
* be done in conjunction with and have the goodwill of the class teacher. The process must be open to review at all times.
* Early levels of integration into mainstream are on a social level only.
* Each child’s individual ability will be taken into consideration.

The Special Needs child will not partake in general class learning until they have mastered the art of:

* entering the class without trepidation
* sitting down at a designated desk
* interacting on a social level with child(ren) nearest them
* having lunch with the whole class
* engaging in a “buddy” system at playtime
* re-acting to general teacher instructions within the classroom setting

**Curricular Integration**:

When the Special Needs child has adjusted on a social level he/she will slowly be introduced to areas of the curriculum appropriate to ability level.

The subjects for integration will be core curriculum subjects such as Maths and English and will involve short structured lessons.

There may also be integration during playtime in the school yard. Children from the Special classes may also be integrated for mainstream school outings and mainstream activities such as Sports Day and Fire Drill.

**Reverse integration**:

The school may operate a policy of reverse integration if it is deemed suitable and this extends to all classes.

Special Needs children may be integrated for Playtime and Aistear through integration or the reverse integration route. This involves withdrawing 3-4 children from mainstream to work with the Special Needs child in his/her own environment. Hopefully this will lead to conventional integration into mainstream in the longer term. The special needs pupils learn play skills and social skills in this environment.

**Staff Development**:

Opportunities for staff development and sharing of information on special needs education and best practice for the implementation of a workable system of integration will be provided through professional development.

**Assessment:** Assessment by observation and testing will be conducted by the class teachers covering 3 aspects of development

* social integration
* language and communication
* play and behaviour

**Home – School Liaison**: ASD Class teachers will inform parents of the level of integration the child has engaged in each day. The parents can then progress this aspect of their child's learning through discussion.

**Review**: This policy was ratified by the Board of Management in October 2023 and will be reviewed on an annual basis.