

St. Bernadette's School
Principal: Mr. J Haran

RN: 19592J



St. Bernadette's Enrolment & Participation Policy

1. Overview of the School

1.1. St. Bernadette's is a co-educational special school which provides education for pupils, aged 4 to 18, with a mild general learning disability. Many of our pupils may have additional needs such as physical disabilities or sensory impairments.

1.2. The School is under the Patronage of the Bishop of Raphoe and was founded in 1978. It is managed by a voluntary Board of Management with representatives from our Patron, the Teaching Staff, Parents and the local Community. As set out below at para 1.8, the school has limited capacity with variable class sizes depending on the needs of the children in each class.

1.3. The school has primary and post primary sections catering for the different age ranges i.e. Primary 4-12 years and Post Primary 13-18 years.

1.4. The quality of education on offer at St. Bernadette's is characterised by the professional dedication of all staff and by the creation of a caring, learning environment within the school which facilitates the nurturing and development of each pupils' full educational potential.

1.5. Our school seeks to be a place where each individual is treated with the highest respect.

1.6. The school consists of 13 classes (30/08/2023) divided into Primary age and Post Primary age sections of the school, along with a dedicated Nurture Room and a Home Economics Room. The school operates from 9.00am – 2.40pm.

1.7. There is a large staff of dedicated Class Teachers, Special Needs Assistants and Specialist Teachers of Woodwork and Computers, who all work alongside the Principal Teacher, School Chef, School Secretary and the School Caretaker. The school is managed by a voluntary Board of Management as set out in 1.2 above.

1.8. The maximum class size in St. Bernadette's is 11 pupils but class sizes may be smaller depending on the number of pupils within a class presenting with comorbid disorders and additional needs. In this instance some classes may be deemed to be at full capacity at a number between 6-11 pupils and in this case no additional children may enrol in these classes during the academic year. The Board will take into account the staff ratios set out in Department of Education Circular 38/2010 (see Appendix 1 hereto) which sets different ratios depending on the needs of the children in each classroom.

1.9. St. Bernadette's School is not a therapeutic school for children with significant emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school is not designated or equipped to cater for children with a history

of violent or extremely challenging behaviours that causes or threatens physical harm to themselves, to other pupils or to staff.

1.10. The criteria for decisions regarding enrolments are set out in this Enrolment Policy and are contingent on the availability of a suitable vacancy relevant to the educational needs of the applicant.

2. Our Curriculum

2.1. At St. Bernadette's School Primary Aged Pupils (4-12) follow the Primary School curriculum based on the 1999 New Primary Curriculum and also the NCCA Curriculum Guidelines for Students with Mild General Learning Difficulties. Post Primary age students (13-16) take part in the JCL2 programme, they complete 3 years. Pupils aged 16-18 follow the school leavers programme

2.2. Our curriculum also places great emphasis on developing Social Life Skills and bringing learning to the pupils through interactive teaching and learning experiences.

2.3. We offer the following academic subjects:

- English
- Maths
- History
- Geography
- Science
- Visual Arts
- Drama
- P.E.
- Music
- SPHE (Social, Personal and Health Education)
- Religious Studies

2.4. And the following subjects are also covered in post primary classes with specialist teachers:

- Home Economics
- Woodwork
- Computers

2.5. We also place a lot of emphasis on development of Oral Language and Communication Skills (through Verbal and Non-Verbal Methodologies) such as Irish Sign Language, Lamh or through use of Assistive Technologies.

3. Enrolment Policy Statement

3.1. In accordance with Section 15(2) (d) of the Education Act 1998, this policy sets out St. Bernadette's Special School's policy on the enrolment of students and their participation in the school.

3.2. This document sets out how we make decisions about admissions. The main criterion for admitting a child who applies for a place is that we have a vacancy in the school which is appropriate given the age and educational needs of the applicant. We only accept applications for students whose primary disability is within the Mild Cognitive and Adaptive Needs range.

3.3. While recognising the right of parents/guardians to enrol their child in the school of their choice, the Board of Management is also responsible for respecting the rights of the existing school community and in particular, the children already enrolled. This requires balanced judgements, which are guided by the principles of natural justice and acting in the best interest of all children.

3.4. Class sizes may vary from class to class depending on the number of pupils within a class presenting with additional needs. In this regard, some classes may be deemed by the Principal to be full to capacity, and in this case the Board of Management may direct that no additional pupils may enrol in these classes during the year. School capacity varies according to the needs profile of the children we are catering for at a particular time.

3.5. Consideration must be given to ensure that a healthy and safe environment for all pupils and staff prevails. Many of our students are already quite vulnerable as a result of their disability and therefore we will not admit any children whose behaviour or needs may create or be a risk to our other, already vulnerable, students.

3.6. This policy is based on the principles of non-discrimination: gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, marital status, race, religious belief, family status. This policy aims to uphold the moral, spiritual, physical and psychological welfare and constitutional rights of all persons concerned. The school will strive to ensure that the principle of "reasonable accommodation" is enacted for all pupils.

4. Enrolment Procedure

4.1. Who can apply on behalf of a child?

As the Constitution recognises parents as the primary educators of their child, applications will only be accepted from parents, legal guardians or someone acting on foot of a court order or statutory power in a parental role. We strongly recommend that parents/guardians visit the school before applying for a place for their child.

4.2. Application and Enrolment Process – Initial steps

Parents are asked to contact the school to obtain an Application Form. This form must be completed in full and all requested documentation must be submitted along with the Application Form for the child to be considered for admission. This Application Form must be returned before the Closing Date for Applications for that particular year of entry (normally the 31st of January). Applications for enrolment will only be accepted from the 1st October in the year preceding the Closing Date. Applications received outside the period between the 1st October and the Closing Date will be returned to the sender. The Closing Date is available from the school office. Where Applications

Forms are received after that time, they will not be considered. Applications for the September intake will be assessed at a Board meeting held in spring. To facilitate children who may need to move school due to a geographical move from another location or for some other exceptional reason such as a change of foster placement within the academic year, applications may also be reviewed during the year. Enrolment otherwise than at the commencement of the school year will be regarded as exceptional and will only occur should a vacancy be available or have arisen in the applicable age range class during the course of the school year. The aim of the Board is to process all fully completed applications within 21 days of the Closing Date.

4.3. Steps in the Application and Enrolment Process

The following procedure will apply to all applications for placement in the School:

- a) Parents send a letter or make a telephone request for admission to the school;
- b) Parents are sent a copy of the Enrolment and Participation Policy and an application form;
- c) Parents are asked to return the following:
 - i. Completed Application form signed by the parents or legal guardians;
 - ii. Full birth certificate;
 - iii. Proof of Address e.g. utility bill;
 - iv. Psychological Assessment report which fulfils the following criteria:
 - Report dates from within the last 24 months,
 - Report confirms that the child has a Mild Cognitive and Adaptive range General Learning Disability,
 - Report states how all, or most, of the child's needs might be best met in St. Bernadette's Special School.
 - Report recommends that a special school placement is required.
 - v. Up to date reports from the child's present school (from within the last 12 months) with the details of the learning and social development of the child and, if applicable, any behaviour issues of relevance.
 - vi. Any other professional reports available, including but not limited to:
 - Psychiatric Assessment,
 - Speech & Language Assessment,
 - Occupational Therapy Report,
 - Social Work Report,
 - Physiotherapy Report
 - Medical Report for medical conditions the child may have
 - vii. Baptismal Certificate (only required where parents wish their child to be involved in preparations for Catholic sacraments)

d) Applications will only be considered where the child has a Mild General Learning Disability with a full scale IQ within the 50-70 range and has needs in the Mild Adaptive range (as confirmed by an appropriate professional's report included in the child's application)¹ and where the following conditions are met:

1. The application form was fully completed, signed and included all enclosures appropriate to the application.

2. The application was received by the Closing Date for applications for that particular year of entry.

3. For entry into the School, the child is at least 4 years old.

4. At least one of the assessment reports provided is from the last 12 months and all of the assessment reports are from within 3 years of the date of application.

5. That there is no evidence from school reports or from the assessment reports that the student has been expelled from a school for behaviour that caused injury to others. If there is such evidence, the application will not be considered.

6. The child's primary diagnosis is not one the following

- Autistic Spectrum Disorder
- Physical and/or Sensory Disabilities
- Emotional and/or Behavioural Disorders
- Attention Deficit Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Oppositional Defiance Disorder or any other conduct disorder
- Any other recognized disorder/disability other than Mild GLD

1 If ambiguity exists as to the exact nature of a child's disability the Board reserves the right to determine whether a child qualifies for St. Bernadette's Special School through further reports, assessments, discussion with relevant professionals and parents

7. The Board may consider applications for places for children with the disabilities listed in paragraph 6 above, provided that they are secondary to a primary diagnosis of Mild GLD **and** they meet the other criteria set out in this paragraph (d).

e) If an applicant does not meet all the criteria set out in (d) above, or the reports supplied do not meet the requirement set out in (d) above, the parents/guardians will be advised that the school is

formally declining a place to their child in the school and will advise the parents of the appeals procedure set out below.

f) If the documents listed at 3.3 (c) (i)- (vii) are not included with the application, the application will be deemed incomplete, will be returned to the child's parents and will not be considered. If the Parents of the child wish to re-submit their fully completed application, they may do so provided the application is received before the closing date and is in accordance with the other requirements of this policy. If a previously incomplete application is re-submitted, it will be considered as having been received on the date of re-submission and not the date of original submission.

g) The closing date for applications will be given to parents with the Application Form but will normally be the 31st March each year. Other than in cases where a vacancy arises during the academic year, applications received during the year will not be considered until after the Closing Date.

h) After the Closing Date, the Board will meet to review the applications. Only those applications which meet all the criteria in paragraph (d) above will be reviewed. The Board may appoint a sub-committee to review applications for admissions and may ask the sub-committee to report to the Board in advance of the Board making any decisions in relation to applications received.

i) Bearing in mind the age and needs of the child and the particular class grouping into the child would be admitted, the Board will employ the following criteria to assess qualifying applications:

- The pupil/teacher ratio will be appropriate to the needs of the child.
- The extent to which a particular child will be able to tolerate a classroom environment containing other children.
- The composition, special needs and ages of the pupils currently enrolled in the class into which the child would be admitted.
- The availability of expertise within the school to deal with any other needs the child may have.
- The extent to which the child's primary diagnosis and capacity to benefit from the educational opportunities available in the school may be affected by any other needs the child may have.
- Date of receipt of fully completed application (priority is given according to date of receipt by the school of each fully completed application)
- There is sufficient physical space in the relevant classroom (in light of the excerpt from Circular 38/2010 at Appendix 1 hereto) and the appropriate class for that child has not reached full capacity.

j) If, on the basis of the criteria set out above, the Board of Management decides to admit a child, a letter of offer will be sent to parents along with the school's Code of Behaviour. This letter of offer

will be issued within 21 days of the closing date for applications. The offer will be subject to parents providing written agreement for their child to adhere to the school's Code of behaviour and the other policies listed on the Application Form. If the Board decides not to enrol a child the parents of the child will also be informed within 21 days of the closing date for applications. If the Board of Management have accepted the child for enrolment, they will then inform and seek SENO/NCSE sanction for school transport arrangements and staffing supports as necessary.

k) Parents will be requested to respond to the offer of a place by a specified date (failure to respond by that date will result in the offer lapsing) and a time will be arranged for them to visit the school to enable the completion of applications forms to the NCSE for school transport and SNA support, if applicable, and other forms related to school enrolment;

l) If the child meets the Criteria set out in (d) above but either the number of applicants has exceeded the vacancies available or enrolment is refused on any other basis, parents/guardians of applicants will be informed that there is currently no place available. In the event of the Board of Management determining that the number of children who meet the criteria for enrolment and in respect of whom a place should be offered exceeds the number of places available, priority will be determined by the date of receipt of fully completed applications. Applicants who meet enrolment criteria and in respect of whom a place should be offered will be offered a place should a suitable and age appropriate place arise up to 30th September in the year of application only. As applicants needs may change over time applicants are not placed on a waiting list for enrolment in future years and such applicants must apply for possible enrolment in the next school year by the closing date for that year of entry. In such a case where there is currently no place available, parents/guardians will be advised that the school is formally declining a place to their child in the school and will advise the parents of the appeals procedure set out below.

4.4. General Principles governing all applications

Parents should note the following principles which apply to all applications for enrolment to the school:

4.4.1. Where possible, enrolment should take place at the beginning of the school year. In exceptional cases, consideration will be given to an application for a child who may have to move during the school year but only where a suitable and age appropriate vacancy is available or has arisen during the school year. Where such a vacancy is not available, the Board will respond after its next meeting following the receipt of such an application to confirm that no such place is currently available and refusing enrolment at that point but confirming that that application will be added to the group of applications that will be considered for enrolment for the following academic year.

4.4.2. The receipt by the school of a completed Application Form, a visit by parents to see the school or the placement of a child's name on a list, however early, does not confer an automatic right to a place in the school,

4.4.3. Siblings of pupils in the school are not automatically entitled to a place in the school.

4.4.4. Please note that all reports relating to a child which have been created by a psychologist, psychiatrist, behavioural therapist, paediatrician or other relevant medical practitioner (who has

produced a report relating to the child's cognitive development, learning ability or educational development) within the three years preceding application must be provided to the school for assessment by the Board of Management. The withholding of reports or relevant information about the needs of the child from the Board of Management may invalidate an Enrolment Application at any time. If, after enrolment, it later becomes apparent that reports or relevant information has been withheld from the school, this may result in an application being invalidated or, if it becomes apparent after enrolment, in the child involved losing their place in the school.

4.5. Exceptional Circumstances warranting refusal of an enrolment - Even where the child would otherwise be eligible for admission, the school reserves the right to refuse enrolment to a pupil in exceptional cases. Such an exceptional case could arise where either:

4.5.1. The pupil has special needs such that, even with additional resources available from the Department of Education and Skills and/or the NCSE, the school cannot meet such needs and/or provide the pupil with an appropriate education;

4.5.2. The members of the Board of Management are reasonably clear from reports, that the pupil poses an unacceptable risk to self or other pupils, to school staff or to school property.

4.5.3. There is a history of violent behaviour on the part of the applicant student such that in the view of the Board the applicant student may cause or may threaten harm to others.

4.5.4. The pupil has previously been expelled from St. Bernadette's Special School or any other school in circumstances where the Board of Management feels that placement in St. Bernadette's Special School would not be appropriate for the child.

4.5.5. There is ambiguity or conflicting evidence that the child has a Mild General Learning Disability from the reports submitted with the application and in such an instance the Board reserves the right to request an independent assessment to be carried out to confirm the diagnosis of Mild GLD before the application can be considered further.

5. Appeals Procedure

5.1. Appeal to the Board of Management - Where a parent is informed that there is no place for their child in the school, they may appeal this refusal to enrol within 21 days to the Board of Management. The Board of Management will consider this appeal and will respond, in the first instance within two weeks from the receipt to appeal. The Board of Management may seek additional information for further assessment in which case the appeal time may be extended up to a total of five weeks.

5.2. Appeal to the Department of Education - If parents are unhappy with the result of the final decision of the Board of Management, they may appeal to the Department of Education and Skills under Section 29 of the Education Act on the official form provided by the Department. Appeal forms are available to download on the Department of Education and Skills website, www.education.ie. Please note that this appeal must be lodged **within 42 days of receipt of the refusal** of the final decision of the Board of Management to enrol a child.

Ratified by the Board of Management: 26/02/2019.

*Class numbers updated 30/08/2023

Chairperson:

Appendix 1: Exerpt from Circular 38/2010

Pupil-teacher-SNA ratio – Special schools/special classes

Disability	Ratio of SNA to class group	Pupil-teacher-ratio
Physical Disability	1:1	10:1
Hearing impairment	1:4	7:1
Visual Impairment	1:4	8:1
Emotional Disturbance	1:4	8:1
Severe Emotional Disturbance	1:1	6:1
Mild General Learning Disability	1:4	11:1
Moderate General Learning Disability	1:2	8:1
Severe/Profound General Learning Disability	2:1	6:1
Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders	2:1	6:1
Specific Learning Disability	-----	9:1
Specific Speech and Language Disorder.	1:3	7:1
Multiple Disabilities	1:1	6:1