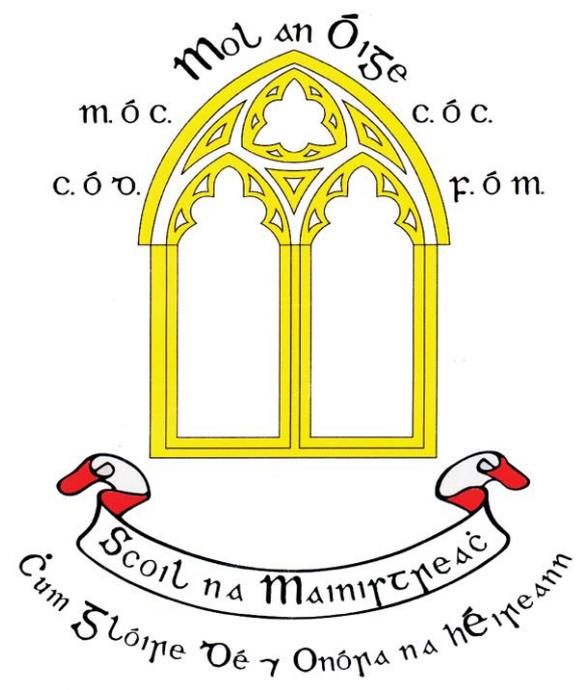**ABBEY VOCATIONAL SCHOOL   DONEGAL TOWN**

ASD Policy

May 2015

Amended   March 2018

MISSION STATEMENT

Abbey Vocational School is dedicated to the holistic development of students in a caring environment where tolerance and respect are nurtured and valued.

Overview of the Autism Support Room

The ASD support room 10 opened in September 2015 and ASD support room 11 opened in September 2017. There are 6 students assigned to each room. All students are on the ASD spectrum and vary from low functioning to high functioning Autism.

The support rooms cater for the students from 8.40am until 4.05pm Mondays and Tuesdays and from 8.40am until 3.25pm on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. Both rooms are manned at all times for the safety of the pupils. The majority of our students use the ASD support rooms during break and lunchtimes. This is a choice for each student, but most like the atmosphere in the rooms. There is always a listening ear to help solve problems or simply talk it over.

Students have access to a locker and individual work station in the support room. The rooms are a focal point for the students and each student's individual needs will be catered for here. Individual timetables and schedules aim to support the student at their unique level, so as to maximise their potential and experience within the school here at AVS.

Students accessing the room may have a reduced curriculum depending on their needs and in order for them to access the room for additional support in social skills, study skills or for reducing anxiety and stress levels.

The teachers and SNAs assigned to the support room are encouraged to undergo continuous professional development in their subject area in relation to the Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Level 2 Junior Cycle

For those students who are not able to take the existing Junior Certificate, the Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LPs) have been designed for a small minority of students with particular special educational needs. These programmes are designed to provide meaningful

learning and learning experiences for students who have general learning disabilities in the higher functioning moderate and low functioning mild categories. These programmes are set in the context of the principles, the 5 key skills (Communication and Language, Living in the community, Numeracy, Personal Care and Preparing for Work) and 24 statements of learning that frame the new Junior Cycle.

For those students completing the level 2 programme it is the responsibilities of all teachers to plan and assess those students. Please see guidelines on www.jct.ie

Teachers supporting in the ASD room:

Teachers who are timetabled for the ASD room prepare a scheme of work for the students timetabled for their class. Each plan needs to be differentiated to cater for all the needs of the students. We understand the need to promote independence within the room and aim to get the most from our students.

Mainstream teachers:

Each mainstream teacher is aware of the ASD students in their class room and can access the SEN files of the students. Each teacher is also given an IEP of the ASD students in order to best accommodate and promote inclusivity. (See appendix 2).

Role of SNA:

Each of our ASD classroom has access to 2 SNAs. These are shared amongst the 6 students in each room and not assigned to one particular student. Some students need support in mainstream classes to help with note taking, recording homework and general classroom management. We aim to help the students become independent and overcome whatever challenges that school life has for them.

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 people with Autism this is of major importance. SNAs are someone who are child with Autism can feel comfortable with and develop a bond with overtime.
- Children with Autism 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 a child with Autism. 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 a child with Autism may be majorly anxious or at risk of getting very angry or upset. It also means there is someone there who can ensure that a child with Autism is not put into a situation which they find particularly hard to cope with.

- The SNA plays an important role in enabling a child with Autism to become more independent. Establishing the balance between gently pushing them on and considering their limits, once the child with Autism 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 a child with Autism. Head-on confrontation will rarely work with a child with Autism, 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 to socialise a child with Autism, 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 a child with Autism 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 the child with Autism 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.

Supporting those on the ASD spectrum

Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) are neurological disorders that are characterised by difficulties with social communication, with social interaction, and with social imagination and flexible thinking. An additional impairment, related to processing sensory information, has been suggested as a further dimension of ASD.

Social Communication

Atypical patterns of social communication can be verbal and non-verbal. Verbal difficulties may include a delay in the development of language, comprehension difficulties, literal thinking and speech, poorly modulated intonation and delivery of speech, echolalia (echoing speech), unusual vocabulary, and repetitive use of language. Non-verbal difficulties include difficulty in empathising with others and in appropriately interpreting social cues, body language and facial expressions. Gestures are often stiff, stilted or over-exaggerated.

Strategies for Impairments in Language and Communication:

- Students require support in understanding the purpose and value of communication.

- Attention needs to be directed to teaching social aspects of language 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).

- Directly teach gestures, facial expressions, emotions, vocal intonation and body language.

- Use visual material and/or signing to support and facilitate students' communicative initiations and responses.

- Provide precise instructions for students to follow.

- 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.

Social Interaction

Problems with social behaviour will sometimes arise from communication and restrictive behaviours - for example, difficulties in interpreting facial expression. Also, as pupils with ASD tend to be literal thinkers, they will have problems with knowing the rules that govern social behaviour.

The following may help when dealing with Impairments in Social Interaction in a classroom setting:

- Students with ASDs are literal thinkers.

- Students are confused by the rules that govern social behaviour.

- Students require direct teaching in social skills.

- It may be necessary to structure opportunities for students to use social skills in different situations.

- Be aware of the difficulties for students inherent in less structured situations such as break, lunchtime, in the corridor and in transitions between lessons.

- Use stories to teach social communication/interaction.

- Develop a 'Buddy system' with mainstream peers.

- Directly teach jokes, puns and metaphors.

Social Imagination and Flexible thinking

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:

- Students 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.

The combination of these three features may result in a range of further behavioural difficulties. Students with ASDs, for example, may engage in hand flapping, rocking or spinning. They may demonstrate heightened sensitivities to noise, smell, taste, touch or visual stimuli. They may also experience erratic sleep patterns, display unusual eating habits, engage in self-injurious or aggressive or hyperactive behaviour, exhibit an unusual posture or gait, and have irrational fears or phobias.

Additional Tips for Learning and Teaching

- Adjustments may need to be made to the classroom to address the student's 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.

- Elicit relevant information regarding the student's eating, drinking and sleeping irregularities.

- Structure the classroom environment to reduce distractions.

- Secure student's 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.

- Disapprove of inappropriate behaviour and not of the student.

(http://www.sess.ie/categories/autismautistic-spectrum-disorders/aspergers/tips-learning-and-teaching)

Members of the Department

Staff Member	Continuous Professional Development Undertaken
Sorcha Begley	· Certificate in Professional Studies in SEN- SLD 1 & Numeracy (Blended Modules) · 4 Day Introduction to Autism in Post primary schools. · 2 Day TEACCH course in setting up an ASD Unit. · 5 Day TEACCH course · 2 Day TTAP · Individualised planning for Students with ASD, Developing IEPs. · Post Graduate Certificate in ASD, St Angela's College, Sligo (2 Year) · ASD and Co-occurring needs · Puberty, Relationships and Sexuality Education for students with ASD · Sensory, Processing and Motor Skill Development for the student with ASD. · Social Stories · Supporting children with Autism as they transition through Education
Orlagh Regan	· Masters in Special Educational Needs – Ongoing (St Patrick College) · Special Educational Needs teaching Practice · Diagnostic Assessment and Individual Education Plans. · Professional Diploma in Special Educational Needs (St Patricks College) - Inclusion - Understanding Autism

	- Challenging Behaviour - Mild General Learning Difficulties - Dissertation: Dyslexia and Dyscalculia · 2 Day TEACCH course · TEACCH Transition Assessment Profile (TTAP)
Martin Gallagher	· Sensory, Processing and Motor Skill Development for the student with ASD.
Leo McLoone	· ASD, St Angela's College, Sligo (Blended Module) · 2 Day TEACCH
Kyle Clarke	· 2 Day TEACCH
Patrice Rooney	· 2 Day TEACCH

Policy and Procedures for Enrolment of students in Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Support Class

Eligibility

The following documentation must be presented to be considered for a place in the ASD support class:

- A completed enrolment form.
- An Educational/Clinical Psychologist's Report recommending the candidate is suitable for a placement in an Autism Spectrum Disorder support classroom. The classroom will cater for children with mild general learning difficulties or moderate learning difficulties. The classroom is not in a position to accommodate children with severe or profound learning difficulties.

- A report from the student's primary school outlining the student's academic, social, emotional and behavioural needs and outlining the current extent of social integration.
- Any other reports e.g. Speech and Language Therapy or Occupational Therapy
- A signed consent form from parents/guardians granting the school permission to access any relevant reports from previous schools attended.

Enrolment Procedure

- All vacancies in the ASD support class will be filled, according to the chronological order of applications, from the date of receipt of completed enrolment form and reports, subject to the above conditions being met.
- Where there are more applicants than places, national schools in the local catchment area will have priority.
- Students who meet the criteria for enrolment but are not offered a place for September will remain on the waiting list in the event that a vacancy should arise during the school year.
- Students must be suitable for inclusion in some mainstream classes or activities with their peer group.

Decisions on Enrolment

Enrolment may be refused to the Abbey Vocational School's ASD support classroom if:

- Students are deemed a risk to themselves or others.
- Enrolment would have a detrimental effect on the education of other students.
- The student's needs are such that, even with additional resources available from the Department of Education and Skills and the HSE, the school cannot meet such needs and/or provide the student with an appropriate education.
- All enrolments are subject to the approval of the Board of Management.
- Should the Board of Management refuse enrolment, parents will be advised of their right to appeal and will be given information on how to do so.

General Information

- Potential students will be visited by a member of the ASD team to observe the student in their existing placement, to liaise with the class teacher and to make preparations for their transition to Abbey Vocational School.
- Potential students' parents will also be met by the ASD team to help with the transition.
- There will be an annual review of the student's placement within the ASD support class to ensure that the class continues to be the most suitable placement option available to the student.
- As a student who is enrolled in the ASD support classroom approaches 18 years of age a transition programme will be put in place to facilitate the student's move to further education or training. A student's chronological age will be considered in assessing the appropriateness of their continued participation in the ASD classroom.

- It is important to note that individual students on the ASD spectrum who access the ASD support room will have their own unique timetable.
- Some students on the ASD spectrum may be more suited to mainstream and may not need to access the services of the ASD support classroom.
- Services such as Speech and Language Therapy and Occupational Therapy are provided by the Health Executive Service. Parents/Guardians please note that AVS has no control over these services.

Transitioning Students to Second Level

Step 1

Parents will fill in an application form for their child to attend the ASD Support Room at the Abbey Vocational School – Forms available in the office.

Step 2

The ASD support room will make contact with the parents.

Step 3

A formal meeting takes place with the parents, primary school support team, Michelle Curran from the ASD support unit in Letterkenny and the AVS ASD Care Team.

Step 4

Contact will be made with the primary school and parent to invite the student to begin a transition programme in AVS. The programme and content will depend on the student's individual needs. Each student will be furnished with a school brochure and map of the school.

Step 5

Potential students will be visited by a member of the ASD team to observe the student in their existing placement if the child is in a special school, to make preparations for their transition to AVS.

Step 6

Potential 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 students there will be an open evening for parents and an open day for the 6th class pupils to help with their induction.

Step 8

The students start in the Abbey Vocational School, the student follows a specific schedule set up by the specialist ASD staff, taking into account 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.

Step 10

Formal IEP process begins.

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. Currently, Michelle Curran and Angela Boyle are involved in this area.

- **Step 2**

  The support room will make contact with the parents and discuss what they hope to achieve for their children.

- **Step 3**

  Investigations will be made by the ASD support team and visits to suitable locations will be arranged. The ASD support 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.

Appendix 1

Minutes of ASD Support Meetings

Date:	
Present:	
Purpose:	
Previous Minutes:	

To Discuss
For Next meeting

Appendix 2:

First half will be completed by ASD Department, remaining half to be completed by all teachers teaching those students with Autism:

Individual Student Plan

Name:	Date of Birth:	Class:	ISP Date:	ISP Review:
SEN Teacher	*Year Head*	*Class Teacher*	*No. Of Subjects*	*SNA*

Abilities Skills and Talents :	Priority Learning Needs:

Nature of SEN :

Priority Recommendations /Targets:	
In my subject area this means: 1. 2. 3.	Strategies to be used:
When completed please retain a copy of this form for your own use and give a copy to the relevant year head. A new plan can be filled out when the student has reached their targets but in any case not less than once per year.	

Based on literature review as well as, examples of international and local good practice.

Appendix 3:

To be completed by ASD department with relevant agencies, parents and student

Individual Education Plan

Template 1

1. Summary Information	
*Name of Pupil***:**	*D.O.B.***:**
*Parents***:**	*Current Age:*
*IEP Coordinator***:**	*S.N.A.***:**
*Other Professionals / Agencies***:**	*Psychologist***:**
*Nature of Special Educational Need***:**	
*Impact of SEN on Educational Development***:**	
*Special Education Provision***:**	
Other Relevant Summary Information:	
*Date of IEP Planning Meeting***:**	*Date of Review***:**

Present at Meeting:

2. Assessment of Educational Performance			
Formal Assessment			
Date	***Name of Test***	***Administered By***	***Outcome***

Informal Assessment (***information gathered from pupil, parents, class teacher, resource teacher, SNA, etc)***

Literacy	
Numeracy	
Communication	
Social Skills	
Life Skills	
Other	

3. Abilities and Learning Needs
Summary of Abilities and Learning Needs
Summary of Abilities, Skills, Talents and Interests
Summary of Learning Needs

Social Skills	
Life Skills	
Literacy	
Numeracy	
Communication	
Other	

Priority Learning Needs	
Area of Need	**Description of Need**

4. Targets				
Targets *(name area of need)*	*Personnel / Location*	*Start Date*	*Review Date*	*Comment / Outcome*

5. Strategies		
Strategies	*Personnel / Location*	*Resources / Materials*

Date: _____