

Admissions (Enrolment) Policy- 2024 - 2025

This policy was reviewed in light of the Education (Admissions to Schools) Act, 2018. This policy is subject to annual review.

Saplings School Mullingar is a school for children with Autism and Complex Needs. It is a multi-denominational school, that has been established by the Minister of Education and Skills, having as its Patron, Saplings Ltd.

The Board of Management of Saplings School Mullingar has reviewed and updated this policy in accordance with the provisions of the Education Act (Admissions to School) 2018, the Education Welfare Act 2000, the Equal Status Act 2000, the Disabilities Act 2002 and the EPSEN Act 2005.

The Board of Management hereby sets out its policy in accordance with the above legislative requirements and trusts that by doing so parents will be assisted in relation to enrolment matters. The enrolment policy is subject to annual review.

General Information: Saplings School, Mullingar is a Special School which caters for children with Autism and Complex Needs.

Name of School: Saplings Special School, Mullingar

Address: Lynn Road, Mullingar N91V5TF

Telephone: 044 9384853

E-mail: Mullingar@saplings.org

Patron: Saplings Ltd

This school policy has regard to the funding, resources, services, and space available.

Rationale

This policy aims to ensure that the appropriate procedures are in place to enable the school:

- To make decisions on all applications in an open and transparent manner consistent with the ethos, the mission statement of the school and legislative requirements.

- To make an accurate and appropriate assessment of the capacity of the school to cater for the needs of applicants in the light of the resources available to it.
- To put in place a framework which will ensure effective and productive relations between students, parents, and teachers where a student is admitted to the school.

Legal Framework

Education (Admissions to Schools) Act ,2018

Section 9 (new section 61) – Admission Statement

This section provides that every school must make an explicit statement in its admission policy that it will not discriminate against an applicant for admission on any of a number of grounds specified, while including provision for single sex schools and denominational schools to reflect, in their admission policy, the exemptions applicable to such schools under equality legislation.

Section 9 (new Section 62) – Admission Policy

This section provides in the main: that every school must draft an admission policy following consultation with the school community and publish the policy , that schools must accept applicants where they have places, that the policy will set out selection criteria that will be applied in the event of the school being oversubscribed ,details of certain selection criteria that schools are prohibited from applying ,that an admission policy should provide details of the school’s arrangements for students who do not wish to attend religious instruction ,for a ban on waiting lists other than lists compiled in oversubscribed schools for the year in which admission is being sought ,for a limit of 25% of available places prioritised for children/grandchildren of past pupils where an oversubscribed school wishes to use this criterion.

Section 9 (new section 62(9)) allows Irish medium schools (where it is their policy to do so) to give priority in admission to students who have a reasonable age-appropriate level of oral fluency in the Irish language, where such fluency would be at risk of regressing if the student were not admitted to an Irish medium school.

Section 9 (new section 63) – Annual Admission Notice

This section requires all boards to prepare and publish an Admission Notice each year. The notice must be published on the school’s website at least one week prior to the school commencing its annual admission process and must provide details about how to obtain a copy of the school’s admission policy and application form for admission.

The notice must also provide the following information regarding the admission process for the school for the school year concerned:

The date on which the school shall commence and cease accepting applications for admission to the school for the school year concerned (there must be a minimum period of 3 weeks between both dates)

The date by which the applicant shall be notified of the decision in relation to their application, (this must be within 3 weeks of the closing date, or within 3 weeks of the application date for late applications)

The date/period by which the applicant shall confirm acceptance of the offer of admission.

That the offer may be withdrawn if the applicant does not accept the offer of admission within the timeframe set out.

In relation to the school year concerned: - the number of school places available in the intake group/in the case of a boarding school, the number of residential and the number of non-residential places available, in the case of a school with a special class the number of school places available in the special class concerned.

Section 11 - Amendment of Equal Status Act 2000: This section amends the Equal Status Act 2000 prohibiting recognised denominational primary schools from using religion as a selection criterion in school admissions.

Under this provision, there is a protection to ensure that a child of a minority faith, can still access a school of their faith. The provision provides that a recognised denominational primary school does not discriminate where it admits as a priority a student from a minority religion who is seeking admission to a school that provides religious instruction or religious education which is the same religious ethos or similar religious ethos to the student seeking admission.

Section 9 (new section 64) - School Fees: This provision in the Act sets out an explicit prohibition on the charging of fees or seeking payment or contributions for an application for admission to or for continued enrolment in a school. Exceptions are included in relation to fee charging secondary schools, the boarding element in Boarding Schools and admission to post leaving cert or further education courses run by post-primary schools.

Goals

The school shall have in place appropriate channels of communication and procedures:

- To inform parents about the school, its programmes, activities, and procedures
- To enable applications for admission to the school to be handled in an open, transparent manner.
- To put in place criteria under which applications shall be considered.
- To ensure that these criteria are informed by our ethos, our mission statement & current legislation.
- To specify what information is required by the school at the time of application.

Policy Considerations

The Board of Management of Saplings School Mullingar reserves the right of admission if such admissions contravene Departmental guidelines on class size, etc.

Taking into account the Department regulations and programmes, the rights of the patron as set out in the Education Act, and the funding available, the school supports the principles of:

- Provision of evidence based appropriate education which is child centred and individualised to each pupil and takes account of the autism specific nature of provision.
- The provision of a range of autism specific education using evidence based, data driven interventions.
- Inclusiveness, particularly with reference to the inclusion of children in a mainstream setting.
- Equality of access and participation in the school.
- Parental choice in relation to enrolment.
- Respect for the diversity of values, beliefs, traditions, languages, and ways of life in society.
- Co-education and committed to encouraging all children to explore their full range of abilities and opportunity.
- Democratically run with active participation by parents in the daily life of the school, whilst positively acknowledging and affirming the professional role of all staff.

The Board of Management will not refuse a child on the basis of ethnicity, disability, (i.e., severity of Autism diagnosis) traveller status, refugee status, political beliefs or family or social circumstances. Enrolment will be based on our enrolment criteria.

Taking all the above into account and based on the advice of the admissions team of the School, the Board of Management reserves the right of admission.

Where the school lacks the necessary resources to meet the needs of any applicant or student, it will make every effort to secure those resources.

The school will maintain a list of refused applicants.

Application Procedure

Before an application is made, parents/guardians should ensure that:

- **The child will be 4 years old on or before the 1st of September of the year in which it is proposed to enroll the child.**
- Parents who wish to enroll their child are required to complete an **Expression of Interest Form** from Saplings Mullingar Special School for Children with Autism and Complex Needs.

A **Valid Expression of Interest Form** for admissions for the next school year (commencing September) will be accepted from Jan 6th to February 19th (of the preceding school year). A **waiting list is not in operation**. All applications received on or prior to the 19th of February will be reviewed by the Admissions team according to the enrolment and selection criteria specified in this policy. The date of receipt of application is not given any additional weighting. Upon receipt of completed Expression of Interest forms and the requested documentation, the school secretary will send an acknowledgment via post/email to the parents/guardians to confirm to the family that the Expression of Interest form has been received and whether it is considered valid. Any form not accompanied by the **necessary documentation** will

not be considered valid until such time as the school receives a copy of the required documentation. Accordingly, it is important to note that any reports or documentation must be furnished to the school by 28th February preceding the school year applied for. **NO GUARANTEE OF A PLACE IS GIVEN OR IMPLIED BY THE RECORDING OF A CHILD'S DETAILS ON THE EXPRESSION OF INTEREST LISTING.**

- The child is living within a reasonable distance from the school and travel time is within acceptable parameters between home and school facilities. Reasonable distance will be defined in accordance with the DES transportation department and the normal special school transport scheme for pupils. (Please check with your local SENO and the Transport Section of the DES)

Necessary Documentation

Applications will only be processed based on a detailed psychological report provided by a qualified psychologist.

The child has a documented and confirmed primary diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

This report must include evidence of the administration of the following tests OR have the equivalent diagnostic tests to conclusively identify autism spectrum disorder (ASD):

- Vineland Adaptive Behaviour Scales Survey Interview Form
- Autism Diagnostic Interview Revised (ADI- R)
- Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS-2)
- Enrolment is confined to pupils where there is clear evidence that enrolment in a special school for autism and complex needs is in the child's best interest.
- Decisions in relation to applications for enrolment are made by the Board of Management of the school in accordance with school policy.

There is a dedicated admissions team formed by the Principal, Deputy Principal and Behaviour Analyst. After the 19th of February, the admissions team meets to consider the current school population and school leavers. With the information obtained it will identify how many vacancies are available for the following academic school year.

Once this process has been completed and the applicant meets the required criteria (see enrolment criteria below) parents/guardians will be notified in writing by the Board of Management of the school as to whether or not their child is being offered a place for the forthcoming school year, by the end of March or, as soon as it is determined that an appropriate class place is available.

While recognizing the right of parents/guardians to enroll 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 judgments, which are guided by the principles of natural justice and acting in the best interest of all children.

Parents and guardians must respond in writing to accept the offer of a school place **within 10 working days of the date on the offer letter**. Failure to respond in writing by the specified

date will result in the child's place being offered to the next family as assessed by the oversubscription criteria. A family who fails to respond within the allocated time frame may re-apply for the following year, where their application will be treated as a new application along with all other applications and assessed on the oversubscription criteria again. Receiving an offer of a place for one school year (and turning it down/ not responding to it) does not guarantee that the same offer will be given the following year.

Parents/guardians cannot defer a place that has been offered to them. However, parents/guardians may submit a new expression of interest form for the next academic year if they feel the timing of a placement does not fit with their child's needs at any given time.

It is the sole responsibility of parents/guardians to inform the school of any change of address or any other contact details in order to remain contactable should a place become available.

The Board of Management will only enroll a student when the school is satisfied that they have all the necessary resources to enable the school to provide the educational, behavioural and care needs required for the student, in order to meet his/her needs appropriately.

Where Expression of Interest Forms are received after the closing date (January 31st time), they will not be considered unless the application is for a transfer in which case the application will be considered by the Board of Management at its next meeting.

Enrolment Criteria

The maximum class size is six pupils. The following criteria will apply in priority order, beginning with

- A primary diagnosis of Autism (fulfilling the DSM V / ICD 10), as outlined in the child's detailed psychological assessment.
- An accompanying intellectual disability.

Selection Criteria if oversubscribed:

The maximum class size is six pupils. If the number of children on the Expression of Interest listing to enrol exceeds the number of places available, the following criteria will apply in priority order, beginning with

1. The needs of the current school children are still met, and the school is able to offer the appropriate resources to the new admissions.
2. Brothers and sisters of existing pupils within the school.
 - *If the number of brothers/sisters of existing pupils exceeds the number that is required for that class, the school will use random selection generator to awards the school place. This may be in the form of an Internet based generator, or a draw conducted by an independent third party.*
3. Children from within the geographical catchment area of the school.
4. In the unlikely event of a tie, the school will use a random selection generator to award the school place. This may be in the form of an Internet based generator, or a draw conducted by an independent third party.

Appeals

Parents who are unhappy with the enrolment decision, may appeal to the Board of Management. This appeal must be addressed, in writing, to the Chairperson of the Board, stating the grounds for the appeal and **lodged within 21 days of the date on the letter of refusal.**

The Board of Management must notify the applicant within **42 calendar days of the date of the decision to refuse admission** that it is not in a position to review the decision and the reasons why.

If unhappy with the outcome of this appeal, they may then appeal to the Department of Education and Science on the official form provided by this Department. This appeal must be **lodged within 63 calendar days of the date on the letter of refusal from the school.**

Transfers from other schools / Units.

Transfer from another school is subject to a place becoming available in an age-appropriate peer grouping (i.e. a child transitions fully onto mainstream or a pupil transitions to adult placement) and in accordance with the stipulations of the school's enrolment policy and D.E.S. guidelines. Should a student transfer from Saplings Mullingar permanently during the school year the student's place will be filled as soon as possible.

- Applications to transfer from other schools will only be considered if the Board is satisfied that the transfer is in the best interests of the child and all the relevant documentation as outlined above is provided. A child will only be accepted for enrolment in such circumstances, after the school is furnished with all relevant information regarding attendance and progress, under the terms of the Education Welfare Act 2000 and where the school is satisfied that they have all the necessary resources available to enable the school to meet the transferring student's needs appropriately.

Discharge Policy

It is school policy to facilitate the discharge of pupils from the school once they have reached the age of eighteen. Pupils who reach the age of eighteen after September 30th in any year will be permitted to complete that academic year. This means a June discharge in the following year. Discharge may also be recommended after the first year and or subsequent years if the admissions team, after consultation with the parents/guardian, feel that placement is no longer appropriate. Discharge from the school may also happen if a pupil is fully integrated into the mainstream school.

Placement Review

Occasionally, concerns regarding the suitability of a child's continued attendance at the school may arise. In such circumstances, a review of the school's ability to continue to meet the child's needs, safety, and the safety of others may be necessary. Any such review will be undertaken by a committee appointed by the Board of Management, in conjunction with the Principal, Behaviour Analyst and other relevant staff members. Parents/guardians should be kept informed of any concerns that might arise in relation to their child's continued attendance at the school at the earliest opportunity. Parents/guardians will also be given an opportunity to engage in the discussion surrounding the placement and concerns that arise from the case itself. If it is determined that the child is not suitably placed in the school,

having regard for the realistic service options available at the time, the BOM may request a multi-disciplinary team assessment be carried out to determine the best options for the specific child.

Evaluation

The Board of Management will monitor the implementation of all aspects of this policy. This policy will be amended and reviewed annually with particular emphasis placed upon

- Effective management placed on application process.
- Clarity and transparency relating to the process.
- Applicants informed in good time re. the status of their application, particularly in the case of refusal to enroll.
- Positive Parental feedback

Monitoring Procedures

The implementation of this policy will be monitored by the Board of Management at the appropriate time. The principal will report to the Board of Management regarding the process of enrolment in December each year and regularly thereafter until enrolment is complete.

Where the Principal refuses admission to any applicant, by the authority delegated to her by the Board in line with this policy, any such refusal shall be communicated to the Board at the earliest opportunity.

Review

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management of Saplings School at its meeting held on:

Date: 24 Sept 24

Review Date: Sept 2025

Signed: Joe Sullivan

Signed Siobhán Burley

Joe Sullivan

Siobhán Burley

Chairperson, Board of Management.

School Principal