



Gormanston College
Special Class (Teach Francis) Policy
2023 - 2025

Our Mission

Franciscan College Gormanston is an educational establishment wherein Catholic values are promoted in accordance with the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi. Its aim is to create a centre of learning committed to the personal development of each individual student, and where the dignity of all is promoted and cherished.

In accordance with this spirit, the decision to provide a special class and centre of learning for students with a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder was taken by the Board of Management of the school in conjunction with the Principal and designated SEN staff in March 2017. This centre of learning is called “Teach Francis” and can cater for a maximum of 18 students to provide and accommodate an education in a mainstream setting for children who fulfil the enrolment criteria.

Teach Francis will strive to offer a positive meaningful educational experience, where all students can develop their full learning potential in an environment that offers structure, predictability and calm. This is done in accordance with our Franciscan tradition for the glory of God and the honour of Ireland.

Aims and Objectives

The purpose of the Autism classes are to assist students with Autism to leave school with the skills necessary to participate, to the best of their ability, in an inclusive way in society and to live independent and fulfilled lives.

Aims and Objectives of Teach Francis:

- To provide a whole school response to the needs of Autistic students within the overall ethos of the school.
- To provide a safe, nurturing and happy environment in which students are guided and supported.
- To provide a predictable and consistent environment where students’ needs are implicitly understood and met.
- To facilitate every aspect of the student’s education from their transfer from primary school to their transition to college/work upon completion of their education at Gormanston College.

- To identify any difficulty that Autistic students are experiencing as early and as thoroughly as possible.
- To encourage parental co-operation and involvement and to keep parents/guardians regularly informed of progress.
- To work in partnership with parents/ guardians, students, the Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) and other outside professionals.
- To set achievable and manageable targets for students attending the Special Class.
- To employ a variety of resources, equipment and teaching strategies to enable differentiation in the approach to the curriculum.
- To provide access to an extended curriculum whereby students are taught in the areas of social skills and life skills training and stress management strategies.
- To promote and encourage the inclusion of all students within the mainstream school.

Overview of the Special Classes

Teach Francis aims to offer an autism specific learning environment within a mainstream, co-educational post-primary school. This setting facilitates optimum inclusion as part of the school community with access to mainstream activities as appropriate. Staff and SNA ratios will be in line with NCSE criteria so that the complex needs of each student are met.

The ASD learning space consists of three large classrooms, a kitchen, two sensory rooms as well as boys and girls disabled toilets. Each classroom can cater for 6 students who each have access to their own individual workstations and individual lockers.

The Autism classes cater for students from 8.30am to 3.45pm Monday and Tuesdays and from 8.45am to 3.05pm Wednesday, Thursday and Fridays. The Autism class is also available to students during break and lunch times and is fully supervised during these times.

Criteria for Enrolment in Special Class (Autism)

The criteria for enrolment to the class incorporating the Dept. of Education and Skills and H.S.E. policies is as follows:

- A recent psychological assessment or a report from a multi-disciplinary team must be provided. A multi-disciplinary team may consist of a Clinical Psychologist, Occupational Therapist, Speech & Language Therapist, Social Worker and a Physiotherapist. Please note all reports in operation on a child should be provided to the school for assessment by the Admissions Team.
- The child seeking a place in Teach Francis **must have a diagnosis of Autism** / Autistic Spectrum Disorder made using the DSM-5 or ICD-10 by the psychologist or team.
- There must be a recommendation by the medical professionals in the report that a special class placement in a mainstream school is both necessary and suitable for the child.
- DES policy dictates that all ability levels should be catered for within Teach Francis. The Board of Management supports such a policy unless the nature and degree of the needs of the student are such that to enrol the student concerned would be inconsistent with both the best interests of the student concerned and the effective provision of education for other students with whom the student concerned is to be educated.

- Children who are enrolled in the Autism class will also be enrolled formally within the mainstream school. A dual enrolment process is in operation.

Allocation of Places

Each of the three classes has places for six students. Places in the classes will be offered to students who meet the enrolment criteria. Places are allocated and approved by the NCSE.

Parents/Guardians whose child (ren) have been refused enrolment may appeal the decision under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998, by accessing the website of the Department of Education and Science.

Enrolment Procedure

The enrolment process is as follows:

1. Registration process begins with an enquiry to the school – this can be a telephone call or a visit from the parents.
2. Prospective parents will then fill in application form which includes date of birth, contact and current school details.
3. Parents must attend an interview with a member of the ASD Team and provide all relevant documents pertaining to their child's diagnosis and to their previous schooling/ education. The diagnosis must be in accordance with the DSM-5 or ICD-10 for resourcing and documentation and must also have a recommendation for a 'special class placement' (NCSE requirements).
4. Where a report outlining the student's care or educational needs is deemed inadequate or out of date (up-to-date reports are considered within one to two years), the Principal/Board of Management may insist that the parents obtain an up to date educational and/or psychological report.
5. Parents must also fill in the NCSE's Notification of Enrolment Form.
6. All documentation will be forwarded to the SENO, on behalf of pupils enrolled in the class. This form is available on the website www.ncse.ie
7. The SENO formally notifies the Principal/Board of Management of those students who have received a place in the Autism class.
8. The principal will issue a formal letter to parents confirming enrolment in the Autism class and requesting that parents complete the enrolment procedure for mainstream school to facilitate dual enrolment of the pupil.
9. The parents must complete a school enrolment form, incorporating family details and medical history and this form should be accompanied by the child's original birth certificate and PPS number.
10. Gormanston College's Autism Special Classes will give initial priority to applications from students already enrolled in Gormanston College who received their ASD diagnosis after enrolment or who have such a diagnosis and receive their recommendation of requiring an autism class place after enrolment.

Induction Procedure

Once dual enrolled, the staff in the Autism class will endeavour to ensure a smooth transition for the student into the Autism class of Gormanston College. The following procedure has been

put in place to ensure that staff have the required information on the student's strengths and needs and that the parents and student are fully supported prior to and during the transition:

1. The parents of a child being offered a place in Teach Francis will be invited to visit the school to meet with a member of the ASD team. Any information requested by the parents will be provided at this meeting.
2. The parents may be requested by the school to consent to a visit by the staff to a child's school/home setting to observe the child.
3. The school may request other relevant documentation of a child is transferring from another school.
4. The parents / guardians will be invited on another occasion to come with their child to the class to meet with staff and see the classes in Teach Francis.
5. The staff of Teach Francis will provide the parents with an information pack about the school, including information on staff, social story for transition and pictures of the school to support the child prior to the transition.
6. Each child in the Special class will be assigned to an age-appropriate mainstream class for integration purposes.

Individualised Timetabling and Inclusion

Individual timetables are created for each student in Teach Francis in consultation with parents, subject teachers, health professionals and the student themselves. These timetables aim to support the student at their unique level to maximise their learning, potential and experience here at Gormanston College. When creating individual timetables for students, a priority is placed on integrating the student into as many mainstream subjects as is appropriate, depending on their intellectual ability, behaviour and sensory needs, and this is achieved in consultation with parents, subject teachers and the student themselves. Each mainstream teacher is aware of the autistic students in their class and can access the individualised file of the students. Individual files are password protected for confidentiality reasons and GDPR compliance.

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

For those students who are not able to access the existing Junior Certificate, the Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LP) will be taught in Teach Francis. These programmes are designed to provide meaningful learning for students with General Learning Disabilities in the higher functioning moderate to low functioning mild range. These programmes are set in the context of the principles, the five key skills (Communication and Language, Living in the community, Numeracy, Personal Care and Preparing for Work) and 24 statements of learning that frame the Junior Cycle. For those students completing the L2LP it is the responsibilities of all teachers to plan and assess those students. For some students, Junior Certificate Subjects may be complemented by the completion of some aspects of the L2LP in accordance with the individual need of the student.

After completing their Junior Certificate and obtaining their Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement, students accessing Teach Francis have the option of doing the schools Transition Year programme after which they can enter the Leaving Certificate Applied programme or

complete the standard Leaving Certificate. The decision on which programme the student should enter is made by the parents in consultation with teachers, outside agencies and professionals and with consideration of the individual students' strengths and needs. Social and Life skills lessons will be available in Teach Francis while the students complete these programmes. Teach Francis staff will support students in their transition out of secondary school with support from the school guidance counsellor.

Assessment

An assessment includes an evaluation of the nature and extent of the student's Autism diagnosis and of the services which the student needs to be able to reach his/her potential and fully participate in and benefit from education.

It may also include:

- Screening tests in literacy and numeracy.
- Diagnostic and informal testing to clarify and identify the exact areas of strength and need*.

*All testing is subject to the consent of parents/ guardians.

Definitive conclusions will not be drawn from these tests. They are, however, used as part of a multifaceted assessment involving:

- a) Information from primary schools- consultation with class teacher, learning support teacher/ resource teacher in the feeder primary schools.
- b) Consultation with parents/ guardians.
- c) Feedback from subject teachers.
- d) Consultation with outside professionals that are involved with students with ASD.

All procedures, test results and information received are documented and filed. In addition, relevant information in relation to a student with Autism specific educational needs is brought to the attention of mainstream teachers.

Individualised Educational Planning

After a period of observation, assessment and interaction with the pupil, an Individual Education Plan (also known as a Student Support File) is developed in consultation with parents, mainstream teachers and relevant professionals.

Contents of a Student Support File include;

1. The nature and degree of the student's special educational needs.
2. The nature and degree of the student's abilities, skills and talents.
3. The special education provision provided to the student.
4. The present level of educational performance of the student.
5. The targets for the student, in which achievement will be attempted, will take place over a period not exceeding 12 months.

This working document will be reviewed on an ongoing basis and a formal review meeting with parents will take place twice a year (in September/October and again February/March).

A copy of the Student Support File is given to and signed by the parents/guardians. It will also be available upon request to the SENO and other relevant professionals.

Exams and Reasonable Accommodations

Reasonable accommodations have been put in place in an effort to negate the stress that is associated with class tests and exams for individual students.

Mainstream teachers are asked to give adequate notice of all class tests. Students in Teach Francis have the option of completing class tests within the class with the teacher or SNA. Students are given extra time (if required) to complete exams and may also be provided with appropriate reasonable accommodations if deemed necessary by the State Examinations Commission.

This process is continued up to and including the Leaving Certificate Examination where reasonable accommodations, if deemed necessary, are made for autistic students under the direction of the Autism Class Co-ordinator and in consultation with students/ parents/ mainstream teachers.

Behaviour Policy

Students enrolled in Teach Francis are expected to follow all the rules of Gormanston College as outlined in the Gormanston College Code of Behaviour.

However, it is accepted that children with special educational needs may display difficult, defiant or oppositional behaviours. All efforts will be made by the school to manage such behaviours using various strategies and through the implementation of the child's Student Support File.

Where a child's behaviour poses a risk to the health and safety of other students in the school, or where a student's behaviour impacts in a negative way on the other children in the class to the extent that their constitutional right to an education is being interfered with as judged by the Board of Management of the School, the school reserves the right to advise parents that a more suitable setting should be found for their child.

Support Services and Links to Outside Agencies

The Special Classes in Gormanston College has established links with the following agencies:

- National Council for Special Education (NCSE)
- Special Education Support Service (SESS)
- Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO)
- National Educational Psychology Service (NEPS)
- HSE services in Meath and North Dublin

Parents should note that a guarantee of support by outside agencies cannot be provided. Children who require speech therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, etc., will be dependent on local HSE services. However, the teaching staff in Teach Proinsias will maintain regular contact with these services so that a multi-agency approach is used to best support the needs of each student.

Review of Policy

A review of this ASD policy will take place very two years.

Formally endorsed by the Board of Management

Chairperson of the Board of Management

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____