

Admissions (Enrolment) Policy- 2025/2026

Introductory Statement

Saplings Special School for Children with Autism and Complex needs, Kill, (hereafter “Saplings Kill”) is a special school funded by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) for children with an autism spectrum disorder and complex needs¹ under the patronage of Saplings Ltd. The school welcomes referrals for enrolment for any student aged between 4 and 18 years of age who has a confirmed diagnosis of Autism (as per DSM-IV or DSM-V or ICD-10 criteria by a certified by a psychiatrist or clinical /educational psychologist)² ; as well as, a recommendation for ASD specific education in a special school setting by an educational/ clinical psychologist. These referrals will be considered for enrolment in accordance with the policies and procedures more fully defined below. This enrolment policy is set out in accordance with the provisions of the Admissions to Schools Act 2018, the Education Act 1998, the Education Welfare Act 2000, the Equal Status Act 2000, the Disabilities Act 2005, and The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004, and the rules for national schools as updated by relevant DES circulars. Parents/guardians who require clarification of any aspect of the policy should contact the Chairperson of the school’s Board of Management, Mr John Whelan, or the School Principal Mr Alan Brennan. Contact details can be obtained through the main school reception 045 878760.

¹ Complex Needs: Individuals with a primary diagnosis on the spectrum of Pervasive Developmental Delay / Autism (Asperger, autism, PDD - NOS) or Autism Spectrum Disorder Level 1, 2 or 3 as per DSM-IV/DSM-V with one or more associated difficulties in terms of: environmental / social disadvantage, cognitive or language impairment, emotional or behavioural problems.

² Assessment and classification of autism or autistic spectrum disorder by a psychiatrist or clinical psychologist using DSM-IV,V or ICD-10 and /or multidisciplinary assessment of same by a professional team (including a clinical psychologist/educational psychologist)

General Information

Saplings Kill one of 12 schools currently recognised by the Department of Education and Skills as a special school established to educate those with autism and complex needs. The goal of Saplings Kill's educational programme is the building of skills for success at home, school, and in the community. The school believes each child, with a diagnosis on the autism spectrum, is unique and therefore should have access to a range of evidence-based interventions that meet their individual needs. Saplings Kill follows this principle with a multi-disciplinary approach to service delivery and a strong focus on evidence-based instructional principles and methodologies such as Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA), Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), Direct Instruction, Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH) etc. in line with the DES policy for special education for children on the autism spectrum. These programmes are founded on empirical evidence and a child-centred learning philosophy; allowing each child to reach his/her own individual goals and progress at their own pace. In addition, supplemental specialist services of speech and language therapy, occupational therapy are made available to children in attendance as the needs present themselves and resources are available from external agencies e.g. HSE

Saplings Kill follows the curricular programmes prescribed by the Department of Education & Skills, which may be amended from time to time in accordance with Sections 9 and 30 of the Education Act (1998). Saplings Kill supports the principles of:

- **Inclusiveness** – particularly with reference to the enrolment of children with a disability or other special educational need.
- **Equality** – of access and participation within the school.
- **Parental Choice** – in relation to enrolment and involvement in the school and
- **Respect of Diversity** – of values, beliefs, traditions and languages.

Saplings Kill depends on the grants and staffing resources provided by the DES. It also operates within the changing regulations laid down, from time to time, by the Department of Education and Skills. Saplings Kill has regard for the resources and funding available to meet the individual needs of students and the number of children per class. Training in the basic skills of communication, behaviour management, self-care and key social competences form an integral part of the school programme at all levels. Children are divided into classes according to their age, skill strengths, developmental needs and their communicative ability by the Principal and Behaviour Analyst.

Current school population

Presently, the school caters for a maximum of 30 children across 5 classrooms and is allotted a staff comprised of an Administrative Principal and Deputy Principal, a Behaviour Analyst, 5 teaching positions, 23 Special Needs Assistants positions, and a full-time secretary.

The Health Service Executive (HSE) employs occupational therapy services, speech and language support services and psychological services, on a limited basis, to work with specific students within the school. The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) also provides a limited service to the school.

Behavioural support services are offered from within the school community and from external consultation where the needs present themselves and the resources are available to fund such services.

The aims of Saplings Kill:

1. To create a welcoming and open environment where students and their families can interact in a secure and supportive manner and where positive relationships with others can be fostered and maintained.
2. To provide a child-centred autism specific education, which draws on a range of evidence based interventions in line with the Minister's Policy for Education.
3. To ensure students have access to a broad, balanced, relevant and developmental range of curricular experiences in each dimension for learning as set out in *The Primary School curriculum (1999)*, the junior cycle program, and any other appropriate curricular resources.
4. To tailor each child's programme to their individual needs and facilitate the development of each child's unique potential.
5. To enhance the functional communication, behaviour management (reduction of behaviours that challenge), and social skills of the children in the school
6. To strive towards the integration of the children in the school into mainstream education, ASD units attached to mainstream primary/secondary schools or another less restrictive special school, having regard for levels of disability, available resources and suitability for such integration.
7. To interact with and develop community links in special education, autism and evidence-based teaching practices on a local, national, and international level.

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 enrol the child.
- Parents who wish to enrol their child are required to complete an **Expression of Interest Form** from Saplings Kill Special School for Children with Autism and Complex Needs (Appendix 1).
Valid Expression of Interest Form³ for admissions for the next school year (commencing September) will be accepted from January 6th to February 6th (of the preceding school year). A waiting list is not in operation. All applications received on or prior the 6th 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 to the parents/guardians to confirm to the family that the Expression of Interest form has been received and whether or not it is considered valid. Any form not accompanied by the **necessary documentation** will not be considered valid until which time as the school receives a copy of the required documentation. Accordingly, it is important to note that all documentation must be furnished to the school by February 6th 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.**
- At the time of application, proof of address must be submitted that verifies 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:

³ In summary, in order to be considered valid an Expression of Interest Form must:

- All sections of the form must be completely and correctly filled in
- The form must be accompanied by the necessary documentation outlined above (see necessary documentation section).

1. The child has a documented and confirmed primary diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The report must detail the classification of ASD by a psychiatrist or clinical/educational psychologist using DSM-IV, DSM-V or ICD-10 criteria or multidisciplinary assessment of same by a professional team (including a clinical psychologist/educational psychologist).
2. The child has a recent (within the last 2 years prior their enrolment date) psychological assessment in which a recommendation for ASD specific education in a special school is recommended by an educational/clinical psychologist.**
3. The expression of interest form is completely filled out and deemed valid.
4. Parents/guardians should also include a letter from the NCSE to submit with their admission application for a special class or special school confirming that the child meets the requirements for enrolment to that setting. (As per circular 80/2024)

**Where it has not been possible to get an updated psychological report the BOM will accept a letter from the original Psychologist/Service that wrote the student's most current report stating that this report confirms the student's diagnosis of Autism and intellectual disability, and that the report's depiction of the student is still current and accurate.

Saplings Kill will admit all applications, where the school has places available and is not oversubscribed. Due to the high number of expression of interest forms Saplings Kill expects to receive on a yearly basis, a selection criterion will apply when oversubscribed. Saplings Kill prohibits interviews, consideration of a student's academic ability, skills or aptitude, consideration of a parent's occupation, financial status, academic ability, skills or aptitude as a consideration for the offer of a place.

There is a dedicated admissions team formed by the Principal, Deputy Principal and Behaviour Analyst. After the 6th 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 year.

A class list for the following academic year will be considered and drafted, thus ensuring that the needs of the current school population are identified and preserved prior to consideration of any new admissions.

Once the number of places available has been determined, the Admissions team will communicate this information to the Board of Management. The Board of Management recognises that the decision to admit new entrants into the school must be made with the understanding of resources available within the school community to meet the unique needs of each child newly enrolled, and in particular, to continue meeting the needs and abilities of the children already enrolled in the school.

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.

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

A school **Enrolment Form**, incorporating family details and medical history is completed on enrolment day for children who have secured a place for the next school year. **(Appendix 2)**.

The Board of Management (BOM) of Saplings Kill recognises that parents/ guardians have a desire and a legal right to request that their child be enrolled in a school of their choice. Saplings Kill operates as a non-denominational special school and there is no formal or informal faith based instruction within the school

Enrolment Criteria

The school's enrolment policy must uphold the framework of the relevant legislation set forth for special school. As such, attention is drawn to Section 2 of the EPSEN Act 2004, which provides that a child with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive setting unless such arrangement is inconsistent with the best interest of the child or with the effective provision of education for those children with whom the child is to be educated.

As such guidelines defined in this enrolment policy, enrolment in Saplings Kill will be confined to pupils for whom:

1. There is clear evidence that enrolment in a special school for Autism and Complex Needs rather than in a mainstream or special school for students with general learning disabilities with no ASD classes is in the child's best interest.
2. This recommendation must be stated in the psychological assessment, in the diagnostic report or in a supplemental psychological report by an educational or clinical psychologist. The BOM, in conjunction with the Principal, In School Management team (ISM) and Behaviour Analyst with a comprehensive review of all supporting assessment reports: (such as one written by a qualified educational or clinical psychologist that state that the applicant child has a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum based on the criteria specified in DSM-IV, DSM-V or ICD-10) and that the report is dated in the two years prior to enrolment date.
3. This documentation should assert that it is in the child's best interest that s/he be enrolled in a special school for children with Autism and Complex Needs. In the event of parents wishing to enrol their child in Saplings Kill from another special school, the multidisciplinary team of the existing school must give written approval that it is in the child's best interest to enrol in Saplings Kill Special School.

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 in a position to offer the appropriate resources to the new admissions.
2. Brothers and sisters of existing pupils within the school.
3. Children who live in the closest proximity to 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.

Induction of New Students

It may be necessary to introduce new students on a phased basis. These students may not initially be expected to complete a full school day.

The first year will be used to:

- Assess the child's educational needs
- Develop an I.E.P. to address identified needs

- Assess whether the child's placement is appropriate

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 autism specific education using evidence based, data driven interventions including Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA), Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), Social Stories, Lámh, Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH), by appropriately qualified professional staff.
- Inclusiveness, particularly with reference to the enrolment of children with a disability or other special education need
- 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 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, traveller status, refugee status, political beliefs or family or social circumstances, provided they fulfil the enrolment criteria while the needs of the current school population can be met. Fulfilling the enrolment criteria does not necessarily ensure enrolment if:

- Necessary resources pertaining to the enrolment are not available
- Sufficient classroom space is not available

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

Discharge Policy

It is the school's Policy to facilitate the discharge of pupils from the school once they have reached that age of eighteen. Pupils, who reach the age of eighteen during an academic year will be permitted to complete that academic year and supported to transition into adult services.

If parents/guardians of a child enrolled in the school decide to remove their child from the school, both parents/legal guardians must do so in writing. If a student leaves the

school and if his/her parents wish to subsequently re-apply for enrolment for their child, the enrolment procedure above applies. Re-enrolment is subject to Saplins Kill School being considered as the most suitable placement for re-enrolment by the multidisciplinary team/ clinical/educational psychologist, and that Saplins Kill Special School's BOM are in agreement that adequate resources are available for re-enrolment.

Admission Date

Normally admission to the school will occur within the first week of the new academic year. Admission at any other time throughout the school year will be at the discretion of the Principal/Board of Management

Transition into Saplins Kill

On occasion, children may transfer into Saplins Kill from a different school or community service provider. This is subject to the School's enrolment policy and available space. Should this be the case, the transition period to Saplins Kill will be determined at the discretion of the BOM and the Principal. The decision of type and length of transition should be based on the individual needs of the child and the overall welfare of current students. As transitions require some planning, a period of up to 6 weeks can at times be a reasonable expectation; however, every effort should be made to make the transition a swift and reasonable process.

Service Expectations

The Principal and Behaviour Analyst will meet with parents/guardians to discuss their child's strengths and needs, profile the supports that may be required as well as the suitability of enrolment. Where the supports required for success go beyond those already in place in the school, the BOM reserve the right to refuse enrolment on grounds of 'Exceptional Circumstances' e.g. a prospective pupil presents with physical needs such that, even with additional resources available from the DES, the school cannot meet such needs and/or provide the pupil with an appropriate education.

A comprehensive approach to education and learning will be used within the school, that is, a range of teaching approaches will be employed, based on the individual needs of the children and the overall principle of an autism-specific child-centred programme. (Some commonly used approaches include: Applied Behaviour Analysts (ABA), the TEACCH programme, Lámh (manual signing system), Social Stories, Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), etc.)

All education interventions used with the child will be:

- a) Specific to the child
- b) based on the outcome of a Psychological/Behavioural Assessment(s) and an Individual Educational Plan (IEP)
- c) evidence-based
- e) measured regularly with teaching objectives and outcomes monitored to ensure on-going success.

Parents/guardians will be consulted regularly with respect to their individual child's progress. Review meetings will occur at minimum on an annual basis, with additional meetings established on a case by case basis that may incorporate programme guides/assessment tools such as the ABLLS-R, VB-MAPP, T-TAP, PEP 3, Language Targets, Behaviour Support Plan's etc. as well as standardised assessment tools where appropriate.

The school is committed to encouraging all children, regardless of the special educational needs associated with ASD, to explore their full range of abilities and opportunities and to actively participate in developmental/academic and or vocational programs where they and their families are respected in their own right. If the BOM considers that additional resources are required to meet the particular educational/safety needs of the child, an application will be made to the Department, via the SENO (Special Education Needs Organiser) to provide same. A case-conference may be called to discuss the needs of a particular child if appropriate. Ongoing placement within Saplings Kill may depend on the provision of specialist resources.

Children enrolled in the school may also be offered the opportunity to be included in the school life of an age-appropriate mainstream class, ASD class attached to a mainstream school or another Special School should their skills be suitable for such an arrangement to be made. The nature of this integration will be determined by the Principal and participating staff, in consultation with the child's parents/guardians and the governing Principal of the selected school; with a view to maximising contact over time.

Health Board Input

Essential services are to be provided by the Health Service Executive. These services include Speech and Language therapy, Occupational therapy, Dental check-ups, Psychological services etc.

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. In the event that 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.

Code of Behaviour

Parents/guardians of children enrolled in Saplings Kill, the members of the Board of Management, staff members and external consultants and volunteers are required to co-operate and support the school Code of Behaviour and all other policies and curricular organisation approved by the school's Board of Management. Enrolment of your child to the school is indicative of support of the school's Code of Behaviour and other core policies. These policies are shared with parents before enrolment and an opportunity to ask question on these policies is provided. The Board of Management trust that parents/guardians will also work collaboratively with school staff as they assist the students themselves in their effort to uphold the School's Code of Behaviour. The Board of Management also expects that parents/guardians of children seeking to enter the school demonstrate the same positive collaboration and supportiveness to the staff and BOM.

Expulsion/suspension procedures are stated in Saplings Kill Code of Behaviour. After following the protocol stated in the named policy the parents will be notified by the Board of Management in writing of their entitlement to appeal a decision of the Board of Management in relation to suspension or expulsion. The content of the letter will provide information to access Circular 22/02 and other related forms.

Appeals

The Board of Management is obliged under section 19(3) of the educational Welfare Act 2000 to make a decision in writing in respect of an application for enrolment within 21 days and to inform the parents in writing of that decision.

In the event that an application for enrolment in Saplings Kill is declined, a parent/guardian has a right to appeal the decision to the Board of Management, in writing, addressed to the Chairperson of the BOM, within 21 calendar days of being notified of the decision.

Refer to Section 29 of the *Education Act (as amended by Section 4 of the Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2007)*, or Section 7 of the *Admissions to Schools Act 2018* available on the Department's website at www.education.ie for further information on appeals. The Board of Management has responsibility for preparing a

response to the appeal committee if and when an appeal is initiated as stated in Section 12, Circular 22/02- Processing of an Appeal.

Policy Review

It is fully acknowledged by all parties that this enrolment policy will be reviewed from time to time to ensure that it is kept up to date and that it retains its relevance. On-going evaluation and new approaches to education, Ministry guidelines, and DES agreements may require this document be modified.

Next review period: Annually

Reviewed on: 24 SEP 24

Chairperson of the Board of

Management: 

Appendix 1.

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FORM- School Year 2025/2026

Name of Child (in full, as on Birth Certificate):

Address at which child resides:

Eircode: _____

Telephone No: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Nationality: _____ Country of Birth: _____

Father's Name: _____ Telephone No: _____

Father's email: _____

Mother's Name: _____ Telephone No: _____

Mother's email: _____

Did your child attend preschool: _____ For how long: _____

Is your child enrolled in another school: YES/NO (**please circle as appropriate**).

If yes, please state school's name and date of enrolment:

Has your child ever had a psychological assessment? Yes ____ (Please note that a copy of the psychological report must be attached to this form)

Note 1: This form is not a guarantee of a place or implication of a guarantee of a place

Note 2: Applications will only be accepted on the basis of a psychological report provided by a qualified professional. (Maximum 2 years old).

Office Use Only:

Received on (please insert date):

APPENDIX 2

School Enrolment Form

Name of Child (in full, as on Birth Certificate)

Address at which child resides:

Date of Birth: _____

Nationality: _____ Country of Birth: _____

***If you change your mobile number during the school year please inform us immediately as it is vital to keep records up to date in case of an emergency.**

Mother's Name: _____ Mobile No: _____

Mother's Email Address: _____

Father's Name: _____ Mobile No: _____

Father's Email Address: _____

Is the child living with both parents? _____

Did your child attend preschool?: _____

For how long?: _____

Where? _____

Is your child currently attending a school? _____

For how long?: _____

Where? _____

Has your child ever had a psychological assessment?

Has your child ever received a speech and language report?

Name of brother/sister in this school:

Please give names, addresses, and phone numbers of the people who have permission to collect your child from school. If there is any change in this routine **please inform the school in writing.**

Person who usually collects child (ren)

_____ Phone

_____ Phone

_____ Phone

_____ Phone

Parents and legal guardians are entitled to be consulted and informed about their child's education and are entitled to access to their child during school hours. If there is any change in this regard or if there is any other information which you think may be relevant it is **very important that the school is informed immediately.**

Other relevant information:

School Emergencies/Sickness/Unexpected Closures, etc.

The following information will be used by the school in the event of:

- Your child feeling sick
- An emergency occurring while the school is in operation, making it necessary to close the school. In such an emergency, it is advisable to ensure the safe return home of pupils
- An unexpected closure of the school.

If my child gets sick, or the school has to close unexpectedly, etc. and there is no one at home/the school is unable to contact me, please provide the name, telephone number and address of two other people you nominate for us to contact. We will ask this person to come and collect your child/children.

Person the school will contact:

1 _____ 2 _____

Tel/mobile: _____

Tel/mobile: _____

Medical Emergency/Accident

That in the event of an emergency or accident, a member of staff will use his/her discretion and bring your child to a Doctor/Hospital. Every effort will be made to contact you.

I authorise that at their discretion a member of staff may bring my child/children to a Doctor/Hospital if an emergency arises.

Signed (Parent/Guardian)

Family Doctor (Only if you wish)

Doctor's Name _____ Telephone No: _____

Do your child/children have any specific medical condition (e.g. asthma, eyesight, hearing etc.) or emotional problems which may affect your child at school?

Medication requirements (Please refer to Medication Policy):

It is the responsibility of parent(s)/guardian(s) to notify the school of any food allergies. Do your child/children have an allergic reaction to medication or food?

Is there any other relevant information about your child/children which we should know?

I consent to the school's Code of Behaviour and related policies.

Parents Signiture(s): _____

I consent to my child's participation in the Relationships and Sexuality Education Programme

Parents Signiture(s):

I consent to my child's participation in the Stay Safe Programme

Parents Signature(s):

During your child's time in Saplings Kill, it may be necessary from time-to-time for teachers to carry out diagnostic testing with your child on an individual basis in order to help them in their educational development. I give permission for any necessary diagnostic tests to be carried out with my child.

Parents Signature(s):

I give permission to allow my child's photograph/image/ video (delete as appropriate) to be included in school-related activities, competitions etc.

Parents Signature(s):

I give permission to allow my child's photograph/image/ video (delete as appropriate) to be included on the school's Facebook page.

Parents Signature(s):

I give permission to allow my family details (name, address, date of birth, etc.) to be given to agencies such as HSE (school nurse, doctor, dentist), etc.

Parents Signature(s):

I wish to enrol my child _____ to Saplings Special School for Children with Autism and Complex Needs, Kill.

I declare the above information to be correct and understand that it will be treated as confidential.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Please ensure that you have included a Birth Certificate with this form. These documents will be photocopied and returned to you.

Principal's signature: _____

Date: _____

Birth Certificate received: Yes No