

Preschool/Primary School

These are some essential starting points we feel are helpful for parents looking for a preschool or primary school place for their autistic child.

It can be overwhelming, confusing and daunting at the beginning of this journey, but you will learn, you will cope and there are people here to help you. There is a whole new language and terminology to learn and many new roles and agencies to interact with. This takes time to get to grips with and you may feel like you will never be able to do what is needed. Just take one step at a time.

This section aims to highlight some key issues which are very relevant at the beginning of your journey.

Firstly, there will be lots of paperwork and application forms. These always look much more difficult than they are and some of the language can seem very formal. The best way to approach this is to be organised - try and approach it as if you were at work. This will help you feel less stressed and overwhelmed. Initially, there can be a lot of form-filling and applications, but this reduces over time. Our Parent Information Officer can help if you are experiencing difficulty in this area. trish@autismsupportlouth.com or 086 078 7356

Prepare

- Get a lever arch file & dividers.
- Keep a copy of everything you send out in the file. This is **very** important.
- Have a control sheet at the front of the file recording who you rang, what they said and when they said they would get back to you.
- Follow up on all phone calls with an email confirming what was said on the phone call.
- Most school admission procedures look for a copy of your child's diagnosis so it's a good idea to have a pile of copies at the ready.
- Even if a form looks terrifying the best thing to do is to get started and complete the name, address etc. sections i.e. write what you know straight away and generally you will have a quarter of it done. Then keep working through it.
- Keep a copy of each school application and when it was submitted
- Ask for help – please contact us for help (details below). There are also a lot of very helpful parent support groups on Facebook. We have a private Facebook group for

parents and close relatives called “Autism Support Louth&Meath”. There is a very strong history of parents supporting other parents who are starting off, so never be afraid to ask a question or ask for help and support. Your best support will be other parents of autistic children so getting to know people in your area is highly beneficial.

Preschool Options:

Dept of Education Early Intervention Classes – Attached to Mainstream Schools

There are a small number of early intervention classes in the Louth/Meath area. The place can last for 2 years and are for children aged between 3 and 5 – (please note that if you turn 6 during the second year then that second year is not available to you).

The teaching ratio is 6 children to 1 teacher and 2 SNAs. To access these classes your child's diagnostic report needs to specifically state that your child needs an EI class.

Transport is provided to Autism Classes and Special Schools. This is usually a minibus or small bus with a driver and bus escort employed by the school. Transport is provided to the nearest appropriate school placement offered.

Department of Education & Skills Early Intervention Preschools by county
<https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Special-Classes-website-12Dec2023.pdf>

Home tuition:

Home Tuition is when a qualified tutor teaches your child in your home. 10 hours Home tuition per week is available for children aged between 2.5 and 3 and 20 hours per week after age 3.

Parents find the tutor and tutors must have a teaching council registration.

The SENO has to confirm that a school place is not currently available. For children aged 4 or 5 they may require that you furnish copies of 3 school place refusals.

There are some private preschools which are funded by pooling a number of children's home tuition grant. These groups have a special arrangement with the Department of Education. Examples are Jonix, Pals, and Social Stars.

You can still receive some Home Tuition hours if you are in receipt of ECCE hours.

Other preschool options:

Early years settings (mainstream private preschools/Montessori schools) supported by the Early Childcare & Education Scheme (ECCE) and Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)

Early years settings supported by HSE grant aid or HSE funded preschool assistant (AIM)

If your child gets a place on one of the above schemes after your home tuition grant has been approved you must notify the Department immediately. Note you can still receive a number of hours (usually 5) of DES Home Tuition even if your child accessing ECCE.

For more information see:

<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/260046/ef631559-7cab-4e0a-a233-5b4f65ac9a51.pdf#page=null>

ECCE

All children in Ireland are entitled to 2 years of free preschool from the ages of 2 years and 8 months until they attend primary school (as long as they are not older than 5 years and 6 months at the end of the preschool year).

Access Inclusion Model - AIM

AIM offers various levels of support for children with disabilities. Once you have chosen your child's preschool, the management will apply for those supports on your child's behalf.

AIM supports are provided through the ECCE programme.

The main supports are grouped into universal or targeted supports.

Universal supports are designed to create a more inclusive culture in Early Learning and Care settings, through training courses and qualifications for staff. Where universal supports are not enough to meet the needs of an individual child, targeted supports are available to ensure the child can meaningfully participate in preschool. In addition to targeted and universal supports, AIM also provides universal design guidelines for Early Learning and Care settings and AIM Inclusive Play resources.

For more information, see <https://aim.gov.ie/aim-supports/>

Primary School:

You need to find a school place yourself for your child. The assessment should indicate which type of school placement will best suit your child but you have to contact schools and find the place yourself.

You should also ensure that you contact your local Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO). The SENO will give you the list of schools with Autism Classes but they will not place your child in the class – you have to approach schools directly. It is important that the SENO knows about your child and what type of place they need if there are not sufficient places available the SENO is responsible for ensuring more schools open ASD Classes.

There are a number of different school options available for autistic children

- Mainstream school without access to an SNA – admission process the same for all children – we would recommend that you initiate contact with the school once your child has been enrolled to ensure any appropriate supports are in place e.g. access to the resource teacher
- Mainstream school with access to an SNA – admission process the same for all children but we would recommend that you initiate contact with the school once your child has been enrolled to ensure appropriate supports are in place
- Autism Class attached to a Mainstream or Special School. These are special classes with 6 students, 1 teacher and 2 SNAs. There may be more SNA allocation to the class depending on the support needs of the children. Autism Classes are for all Autistic Children not just those who are likely to mainstream full or even part-time.
- Special School – Class sizes vary from 9 to 12 and there will be 1 teacher and different numbers of SNAs depending on the allocation for the class. Some special schools cater specifically for autistic students while others cater for general intellectual disability and may also have Autism specific classes. Each special school will have a specific student teacher ratio. Special schools cater for students from both primary and post-primary and will have certain enrolment criteria.
- Special School for Children with Autism and Complex Needs – Class sizes 6 children, 1 teacher and 2 SNA. There may be more SNA allocation to the class depending on the support needs of the children.

If you are applying to Autism Classes or Special Schools we would recommend that you apply to all in a wide radius of your home. Ensure the SENO for your area knows you are looking for a school place.

A student with additional needs may need the support of a special needs assistant (SNA), SNAs are not assigned to any particular student and are deployed within the school to those students needing support to meet primary care e.g. safety, toileting, and supervision. Schools apply to the NCSE for SNA allocation hours based on the care needs of their student population.

In December 2019, the Irish Government approved the national rollout of a new frontloading model for the allocation of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support to mainstream primary and post-primary schools, which will be based on the school profile. This has been temporarily deferred. SNA duties are assigned at the discretion of the Principal / Board of Management and are monitored on an ongoing basis, focusing on particular care needs of students in the school.

A diagnosis of disability and/or professional report will not be required for a student to access SNA support. However, if professional reports are available regarding a student's needs, they should be used to guide schools in planning supports. Parents/guardians should bring any reports to the attention of the school to facilitate and inform appropriate interventions.

Transport

Transport is provided to Autism Classes and Special Schools. This is usually a minibus or small bus with a driver and bus escort employed by the school. Transport is provided to the nearest appropriate school placement offered.

Children are eligible for transport where they have special educational needs arising from a diagnosed disability in accordance with the designation of high and low incidence disability set out in DoES circular 02/05.

A child with additional educational needs is eligible for the School Transport Scheme which is funded by the Department of Education and Skills (DES). They may avail of this scheme once they are attending their nearest mainstream or special school or autism class in a mainstream school. Applications for school transport can be made to the school. Once the school has reviewed the application, they will forward the application to the School Transport Section of the Department of Education principal, who will contact the local SENO on your behalf. Once the SENO and Skills.

If there is no existing run then a new one will be set up. You may have to drive your child in the interim and a grant of .39 per km each way is paid. If there is no existing run some parents opt to continue to do the run and claim the grant. The school should make the application for you. The grant is paid at the end of the school year but you can request that it is paid at the end of each term.

Summer Provision/July Provision

The Summer Programme (previously known as July Provision) is run by the Department of Education for primary and post-primary students with complex additional educational needs and those at the greatest risk of educational disadvantage.

The programme's aims are to support pupils to stay engaged with their education over the summer months. The purpose of this is to build their confidence and increase their motivation, promote wellbeing and for some who are at key transition stages, help to ensure they can move on to their planned educational placement next September.

This is a voluntary programme and not all schools avail of the opportunity to engage with this programme. There are two programmes available for eligible students In-School Summer Programme and Home-Based Summer Programme.

The information/application for Summer Provision is usually published after Easter. Every individual school can decide whether they are going to offer Summer Provision on a year-to-year basis. A school can offer up to 5 weeks of Summer Provision but most offer 2 if doing it. If school-based summer provision transport and all other supports are still in place and the school receives a number of grants to support additional activities during Summer Provision.

If a school is not offering School Based Summer Provision they should make a return relating to your child on the online portal stating that your child is eligible for Summer Provision and that the school is not offering it. You should receive an email from the

Summer Provision Section in the Department of Education following this. You are now sanctioned for 40 hours (10 per week) Summer Provision. You have to find your own tutor who can be a qualified teacher or an SNA, unlike Home Tuition during the school year. The tutor or parent submits the claim form at the end of the 4 weeks. It is very important that this form is completed correctly to reduce delay in payment as this can take months in some cases.

Is my child eligible for an Irish language exemption?

The Irish Language is a core subject in Ireland's school curriculum and most students are therefore expected to study the subject. However, the Department of Education allows students to apply for an exemption from studying Irish in primary and secondary schools. If a student is exempt, it means they do not have to study Irish. Although a diagnosis/psychological assessment is no longer necessary to apply for an exemption, **an autism diagnosis alone is not sufficient** either. The child must instead meet the following criteria:

- Significant literacy difficulty even after supports are provided (this should be recorded in their SSP)
- Have a standardised score at or below the 10th percentile in reading or spelling

Or

- 'Multiple and persistent needs which affect their learning and participation'
- Written evidence that these needs persist even after supports are provided (this should be recorded in their SSP)

You can find the full criteria for primary schools [here](#) and for secondary schools [here](#). The child should have been given every opportunity to study Irish and exemptions are not usually considered until the child has reached second class. There are exceptions to this, however. Children who are enrolled in a special school or a special class **on a full-time basis** will not need to apply for an Irish exemption as they will already qualify. Likewise, children who were previously enrolled in a special school or class are exempt.

How do I apply for an Irish language exemption?

Applications for Irish exemptions are now made to the school principal, who will base their decision on whether learning Irish is causing the child undue difficulties with his/her

language development. The principal will need evidence of this from the child's parent/guardians and all staff involved in the child's education.

Relationship with your child's school – Team Approach

It is really important to build a good relationship with your child's school. Home and school are the two main influences on a child and it is essential that you have a good and open relationship with the school. E.g. if your child is using a particular communication system then it should be used at school and at home. Communication between home and school should be clear and regular – e.g. communication book – Aladdin – or whatever system the school uses.

This is particularly relevant when for instance implementing a personal care programme e.g. toileting. Everyone both home and school should be following the same plan.

It's important that you take an active part in the Individual Education Plan IEP. Take time to read it and ensure the goals that are important to your family are included if possible.

Sometimes a child may have a programme from a private OT or SLT. While it is good to share this information with the Teacher the school is not responsible for implementing any plans or programmes drawn up by external professionals. In most cases, it will be possible to incorporate most activities and knowledge within the school day esp. sensory needs and communication plans.

A child spends the majority of their time between home and school and these are the two biggest influences on a child's life. Building a strong and communicative relationship with the school from the beginning is a good idea – the school is part of your child's "Team".

Contact Us

Jacinta Walsh: jacinta@autismsupportlouth.com or 087 240 7431 with any queries.

Trish Flood, Parent Information Officer: trish@autismsupportlouth.com or 086 078 7356

Elsa Roddy, Policy & Programme Co-ordinator elsa@autismsupportlouth.com or 086 176 4095

Join our private Facebook page for carers and close family members of autistic persons – Autism Support Louth&Meath