

# Newport | NS

## 2020/2021

### Prospectus

# 'Explorers'

Classes for children with ASD

## Staff for 2019/2020

### Teachers:

Early Explorers:	Brid McAuley	
Junior Explorers:	Maria Molloy	Helen O'Hara
Senior Explorers:	Sinead English	

### Special Needs Assistants:

Early Explorers:	Ann Chambers	Norah Kelly
Junior Explorers:	Pauline Morrin	Davina Carney
Senior Explorers:	Liz Hughes	Martin Hughes

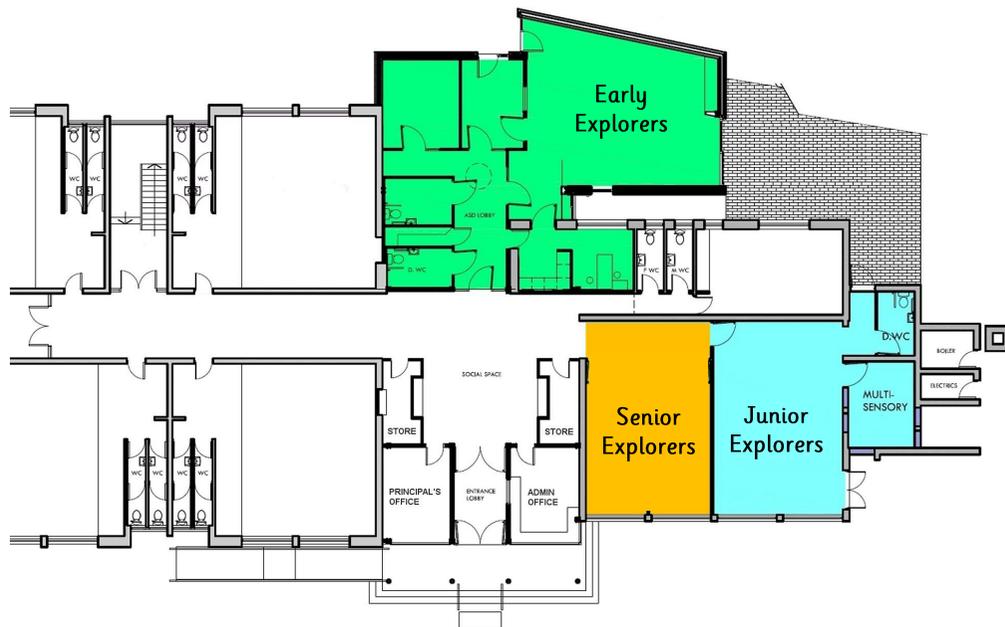
**School Principal** Brid Chambers

**The School Day** 9.20am – 3pm (Ages 6 - 12)

9.20am – 2pm (Ages 3½ - 6)

*(a child may also benefit from a reduced day)*

## Clinical Support provided by HSE & Western Care



**FLOOR PLAN of  
EXPLORERS' CLASSES**

## Enrolment Policy

- Priority will be given to pupils from the catchment area of Newport.
- Priority will be given to siblings of existing pupils
- Maximum number of pupils – 6 per class
- Age range: Children from the ages of 3.5-12 on Sept 1<sup>st</sup> of the enrolment year.
- ASD pre-school Early Intervention Class for age 3.5 – 6. Transfer to ASD Special classes not automatic
- All Pupils wishing to enrol must have a written diagnosis of Autism, with a recommendation of placement in a special Autism Class.
- All pupils should be toilet trained.
- The class caters for children with mild or moderate learning difficulties.
- In the academic year in which the pupil turns 6, pupils in the early intervention class are reviewed to establish the most appropriate placement for them.

The school will meet with the parents of the child to discuss the child's needs and the school's suitability or capability in meeting those needs. If necessary, a full case conference involving all parties may be held. The Board may decide to defer enrolment of a particular child, pending

- (a) the receipt of an assessment report and/or
- (b) the provision of appropriate resources by the DES to meet the needs specified in the psychological and/or medical report.

Consultation as to who might be enrolled in class will be made by a panel consisting of Principal, Teacher in Autism class, representative of the Board of Management, a NEPS psychologist, and a representative from Western Care. The final decision will be made by Principal, Special Class Teacher, and Chairperson of the Board of Management.



## Communication

The homework journal is the usual means of communication between home and school. Parents and teachers usually write a note to highlight successes achieved during the day in order that they are acknowledged. Formal Parent Teacher meetings are held in October when the children have had a chance to settle into the new term and again in February when Individual Education Plans are being reviewed. At other times throughout the year parents may telephone the school to arrange an appointment with the teacher if an issue has arisen.

## Facilities and Activities

Children participate in a wide range of activities which include swimming, hiking, trips to playground, shopping, and O.T.

We have a safe play area outside for small children as well as the main playgrounds. We offer a teaching kitchen where life skills are taught, a teaching bathroom where self care skills are taught, large fully equipped classrooms, sensory and withdrawal room.

## Code of Behaviour

Children enrolled in the ASD class are governed by the school's Code of Conduct. We adopt a positive approach to instilling the principles of respect, tolerance of difference and kindness. We expect a high standard of behaviour from all our pupils. There may be a need at times to compile a specific behaviour plan for a pupil who displays challenging behaviour. The school's policy on challenging behaviour will be consulted in this instance, and it will be used to inform the individual behaviour plan.

## Uniform

Children from Junior Infants to 6th class wear the school's agreed uniform. Our uniform consists of a white shirt, navy jumper/cardigan, grey trousers (boys), grey pinafore or skirt (girls), striped tie and dark shoes. The uniform is available in Corcoran's and Sheridan's shops in Newport and Dunnes Stores in Castlebar. The tie should be purchased from Newport NS directly. Children in Early Explorers wear navy tracksuit bottom, white polo shirt and navy sweatshirt.

## Background History

Newport N.S., which is a mainstream vertical co-educational school under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Tuam, established a class for children with autism in 2006 and subsequently extended to include an early intervention class in 2013. Over the years the school has gained a reputation for providing an excellent service to children with autism. We have highly trained staff members who are committed to fostering a caring and supportive environment for children with autism and their families. We provide facilities in our custom built building which address and alleviate the sensory, social and communication difficulties often associated with children who have a diagnosis of autism.

## Our Mission

Given the difficulties children with autism experience in understanding communication and social behaviour, we aim to offer a positive meaningful educational experience which allows the child to develop to his/her full potential in an environment that offers clarity, predictability and calm. We take special care to ensure that the environment and the staff provide emotional security for safety, comfort and cognitive challenge. We respect what Gary Mesibov refers to as the culture of autism and do not take "being like us" as an educational goal (Mesibov & Shea, 1996). We, the staff, aim to act as interpreters between two cultures and strive to make the components of the non-autistic world more easily understood by the child in our care. We work in close collaboration with parents whom we value as the primary educators of their children.

After a period of time observing and interacting with the children, Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are developed in consultation with parents and the clinical team for each child based on his/her needs. The IEP incorporates

- 1:1 work
- Independent work
- Group work

An IEP is always working at the developmental level of the individual child. These plans are reviewed on an ongoing basis through informal consultation with parents and clinical team, and the more formal format of Individual Education Plan (IEP) review meetings.

## Early Intervention

Our Early Explorers class takes pupil from 3 years 6 months upwards. This is a pre-school class, and the range of activities is at a pre-school level—learning through play, Aistear. We place an emphasis on ensuring the child has some means of communication before they leave this class—through PECS if non-verbal or pre-verbal, and with an emphasis on oral language for verbal pupils. The pupils proceed into Junior Infants in the academic year they turn 6 years.

## Autism Explained

Autism or Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) involve three fundamental areas deficit, often referred to as the triad of impairments, as outlined by Lorna Wing and Judith Gould (1997) cited in Cumine, Leach & Stevenson, (2000):

- Impairment of Social Interaction
- Impairment of Social Communication
- Impairment of Social Imagination.

The children are affected in their ability to understand social behaviour, which affects their ability to interact with other children and adults. They are affected in their ability to understand and use verbal and non-verbal communication. And they are affected in their ability to think and behave flexibly (Jones, 2002).

## Intellectual ability

Children with autism can present with varying degrees of intelligence, from those presenting with severe or profound learning difficulties to those of well above-average ability (Howlin, 1998; Jones, 2002; Jordan, 1999).

## Sensory Perception and responses

A child with autism...

- may find certain sounds distressing and react by covering ears, crying or trying to get away from the source of the offending sound
- may be hyper-sensitive (over-sensitive) or hypo-sensitive (under-sensitive) to temperature or touch by people, objects or even the material of their clothing
- May become absorbed by visual patterns
- May actively avoid the broadening of tastes and show a preference for certain foods, textures or smells (Jones, 2002; Kranowitz Stock, 1999).

## General Timetable for pre-schoolers

9:20am	Welcome Workstations / 1:1 work / Gym Room / Sensory Diets / Play Gross Motor group work in Hall
9:40am	1:1 / Workstations / Play / Gym Room / Sensory Diets / OT Programmes / Play Sensory Group
10:00am	Outdoor Play
10:20am	OT Gym
10:50am	Snack / Yard
11:10am	Circle Time, Songs and News
11:20am	1:1 / Groups Activities (Art, Playdough, Water4-play, Play) / Gym Room / Computer / Workstations
11:40am	Sensory Room / 1:1 Group—games, stories
12:00am	Workstations / Play
12:30pm	Music and Lunch
1:00pm	Yard
1:30pm	Art

## Integration into Mainstream

Our school actively fosters and promotes inclusion for all children. We facilitate optimum inclusion particularly in the area of play and socialisation. A timetable for integration into mainstream is drawn up in conjunction with parents and the class teacher. We have had students who transfer permanently into mainstream following a staggered approach to integration. While some children may need the support of a SNA initially, we strive towards promoting independence and enabling children to participate in mainstream classes unaccompanied.

## Social Stories

A Social Story describes a situation, skill, or concept in terms of relevant social cues, perspectives, and common responses in a specifically defined style and format.

The goal of a Social Story is to share accurate social information in a patient and reassuring manner that is easily understood by its audience. Half of all Social Stories developed should affirm something that an individual does well.

Although the goal of a Story should never be to change the individual's behaviour, that individual's improved understanding of events and expectations may lead to more effective responses.

## RPM

RPM (Rapid Prompting Method) is a teaching method that teaches the pupil to respond to the teacher—not through speech, but through making 50/50 choices on paper. Gradually the pupil is taught to point to letters on a letter board and then he or she can spell the answers.

## ABA

While our approach has many behavioural elements including task analysis, teaching in small steps and rewarding appropriate responses and behaviours, the emphasis is less on reinforcing a cue dependent learning style and more about reaching the child and supporting his/her intrinsic development by providing meaningful learning opportunities appropriate to his/her developmental level.

See the following page for an example of a daily timetable.



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## Individuality

Individuals with autism...

*Differ from one another reflecting differences in the severity of their autism, their intellectual ability and any additional difficulties (Jones, 2002, p.2).*

Their personality and life experiences will also have had an impact and continue to impact on how s/he presents at school. Each child needs to be understood and treated in all respects as an individual.

## Intervention Methods

There are many different educational interventions for children with autism. The main ones that we draw on within the classes are

- **TEACCH** (Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication Handicapped Children) (Schopler and Mesibov, 1995)
- **Intensive Interaction** (Nind and Hewett, 1994; Hewett and Nind, 1998)
- **Floor Time** (Greenspan)
- Picture Exchange Communication System (**PECS**) (Bondy and Frost, 1994)
- **Sensory Integration**
- **Music Interaction**
- **RPM** (Rapid Prompting Method)
- Applied Behavioural Analysis (**ABA**)
- **Social Stories**
- Crisis Therapeutic Intervention (**TCI**) designed to teach staff how to help children learn constructive ways to handle a crisis.
- Integration into mainstream class

A detailed explanation of the approaches is outlined in the following pages.

## TEACCH

This approach is based on the principles of structured teaching that aims to use the child's visual strengths to help them understand what is required (Schopler & Mesibov, 1995).

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The main TEACCH strategies are

- Physical structure: how the environment is organised;
- Applied to our classroom, this means dividing the room into definite areas where specific activities take place e.g.
- “I work independently at my workstation”
- “I work with Teacher at the 1:1 table”
- “I take part in group activities at the group spaces”
- “I play in the play corner and in the gym-room”

Daily schedules: which support the children’s understanding of what they are supposed to be doing now and what they will be doing next

Work-systems: which visually explain what has to be done, how long it is going to take and what will happen next

Visual instructions: that communicate the job to be done within any given task (Jones, 2002; Jones & Jordan, 2000).

## **Intensive Interaction and Floor Time (as supported by Speech and Language Therapist)**

This programme is based on typical early childhood interaction techniques as used naturally between the parent and child which affirms the concept that two way interaction can be rewarding and fun. It involves following the child’s lead and affording meaning by imitating the child’s chosen activity and building turn-taking routines around it (Cumine et al., 2000; Nind & Hewitt, 1994, cited in Nind, 1999). Joining in, rather than interrupting, an activity like lining up objects can afford the child and the adult some quality sharing that can be built into turn-taking thereby enhancing the relationship and affirming the adult as an accomplice in the difficult world of communication.

It is a priority in this unit to maintain open channels of communication and to build strong trusting relationships between staff and children through broad use of play. It is perhaps these very relationships that will enable meaningful learning now and in the future education of these children.

## **PECS**

PECS teaches children to communicate with staff through picture exchange as opposed to the verbal exchange that we are all used to. The programme is individually assessed and built around the preferred activities of the individual child in order to facilitate spontaneity and a desire to communicate (Jones & Jordan, 2000). It initially involves the exchange of a symbol card for the desired item and once the system is understood can progress to the construction of sentences and the use of these for commenting for example “I see....”

## **Sensory Integration**

Sensory integration exercises are integrated throughout daily schedule to promote healthy sensory processing. This supports efficient...

- Intake of sensory messages from our bodies and surroundings
- Interpretation of these messages in the central nervous system
- Organisation of our purposeful responses.

General activities include: swinging, squashing, gross and fine motor movements, pulling, pushing, lifting/carrying, pressing, rocking, twirling, rapping and rolling. Sensory integration is also an integral part of the children’s sensory diets as devised by the Occupational Therapist based on individual assessments.

## **Music Interaction**

Singing running commentary songs, which acknowledge and label what the child is doing, plays a large part in our approach to language acquisition (providing the individual child likes music!). Gradually progressing to leaving out key words and phrases giving the child opportunity to fill in the gap and express him/herself at his/her own level also supports meaningful language development.

For example:

- Hello ...
- Bye, bye ....