Admissions Policy of Saplings Special School Carlow

School Address: Killeshin, Co. Carlow
Roll number: 20370V
School Patron/s: Saplings

1. Introduction

This Admission Policy complies with the requirements of the Education Act 1998, the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 and the Equal Status Act 2000. The policy has also been developed having regard to relevant legislation and guidance, including the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004, the Disability Act 2005, relevant Department of Education circulars and National Council for Special Education (NCSE) policy and guidance.

In drafting this policy, the Board of Management of Saplings Special School Carlow consulted with school staff, the school Patron and parents of children attending the school.

The policy was approved by the school Patron in October 2026. It is published on the school's website and will be made available in hardcopy, on request, to any person who requests it.

The relevant dates and timelines for the Saplings Special School Carlow admission process are set out in the school's Annual Admission Notice, which is published annually on the school's website at least one week before the commencement of the admission process for the school year concerned.

This policy must be read in conjunction with the Annual Admission Notice for the school year concerned. The Annual Admission Notice sets out, among other matters, the relevant dates for applications and the number of places available for that school year. The existing policy already establishes that admissions are governed by the Annual Admission Notice and its specified application timelines.

The Application Form for Admission is published on the school's website and will be made available in hardcopy, on request, to any person who requests it.

Saplings Special School Carlow will cooperate with the National Council for Special Education in the performance by the Council of its functions under the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 relating to the provision of education to children with special educational needs, including in particular by the provision and operation of a special class or classes when requested to do so by the Council.

Saplings Special School will comply with any direction served on the patron or the board, as the case may be, under section 37A and any direction served on the board under section 67(4B) of the Education Act.

NCSE Notification Timeline

The Department of Education and the NCSE have introduced new measures to support better forward planning and to provide earlier clarity for families of children with special educational needs.

- Parents/guardians must notify the NCSE by 1 September 2026 if their child requires a special class or special school place for the 2027/2028 school year.
- Parents/guardians can notify the NCSE via the Parents Notify System on the NCSE website: https://www.ncse.ie/parents-notify-for-september-2027-update/
- Parents/guardians who engage with this process will receive a letter from the NCSE confirming the outcome of their review of supporting evidence. This letter must be provided to schools as part of the application for enrolment.
- Applications for 2027/28 must be accompanied by an NCSE 2027/28 Special School Eligibility Letter. Letters of eligibility apply only to the school year to which the notification to the NCSE refers. Each child must have a valid 2027/28 eligibility letter.

2. Characteristic spirit and general objectives of the school

Saplings Special School Carlow is committed to providing a safe, respectful, inclusive and affirming educational environment for autistic students with complex learning profiles. The school is co-educational and non-denominational and welcomes children of all faiths and none. It respects and values diversity in culture, beliefs, language and ways of life.

The characteristic spirit of the school is reflected in its commitment to student-centred, individualised and evidence-informed education that recognises and values neurodiversity. Educational provision is responsive to each student's identity, strengths, communication profile, learning style and individual support needs, with a particular focus on communication, autonomy, sensory regulation, participation, wellbeing and learning.

The school recognises parents/guardians and families as active partners in education and values the professional expertise of its staff. It seeks to foster meaningful participation by students and their families in the life of the school and to support each student to develop their abilities and potential across social, academic and personal domains.

In keeping with its characteristic spirit, the general objectives of Saplings Special School Carlow are to:

- provide high-quality, autism-specific education that is responsive to each student's individual strengths, needs and learning profile;

- support students' communication, autonomy, sensory regulation, participation, wellbeing and learning through respectful, individualised and evidence-informed approaches;
- provide access to a broad, balanced, relevant and meaningful curriculum, including the Primary Curriculum Framework and Junior and Senior Cycle programmes, as appropriate;
- promote inclusion, equality of access and meaningful participation in school life;
- respect the dignity, individuality, rights and diversity of every student;
- work collaboratively with parents/guardians and families as partners in their child's education;
- support students to develop their abilities and potential across social, academic and personal domains; and
- where appropriate, support students to access less restrictive educational settings through planned, student-centred transitions.

3. Admission Statement

In accordance with its obligations under the Education Act 1998, the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 and the Equal Status Act 2000, Saplings Special School Carlow will not discriminate in its admission of a student to the school on any of the following grounds:

(a) the gender ground of the student or the applicant in respect of the student concerned,
(b) the civil status ground of the student or the applicant in respect of the student concerned,
(c) the family status ground of the student or the applicant in respect of the student concerned,
(d) the sexual orientation ground of the student or the applicant in respect of the student concerned,
(e) the religion ground of the student or the applicant in respect of the student concerned,
(f) the disability ground of the student or the applicant in respect of the student concerned,
(g) the ground of race of the student or the applicant in respect of the student concerned,
(h) the Traveller community ground of the student or the applicant in respect of the student concerned, or
(i) the ground that the student or the applicant in respect of the student concerned has special educational needs

As per section 61 (3) of the Education Act 1998, 'civil status ground', 'disability ground', 'discriminate', 'family status ground', 'gender ground', 'ground of race', 'religion ground', 'sexual orientation ground' and 'Traveller community ground' shall be construed in accordance with section 3 of the Equal Status Act 2000.

Saplings Carlow is a school which, with the approval of the Minister for Education and Skills, provides an education exclusively for students with a category or categories of special educational needs specified by the Minister and does not discriminate in relation to the admission of a student who does not have the category of needs specified.

4. Categories of Special Educational Needs catered for in the school

Saplings Carlow with the approval of the Minister for Education and Skills, provides education exclusively for students with a primary diagnosis of autism and complex needs.

5. Admission of Students

Enrolment is confined to pupils where there is clear evidence that enrolment in an **autism specific** special school rather than a mainstream school or another designation of special school is in the child's best interest. The maximum class size is six pupils.

Children and young people are eligible for enrolment in Saplings Special School when the following is provided in support of such an application:

1. Professional** report(s) outlining: …..
    a. Diagnosis of Autism: DSM IV/V or ICD 10/11 (psychologist, psychiatrist, multidisciplinary report)
    AND
    b. A demonstration of the understanding of complexity of the child's overall level of need/s evidenced in the professional reports
    AND
    c. Given the severity or complexity of the child's support needs, a clear professional recommendation outlining that an Autism Special School is required to best meet the child's needs, along with the rationale for same
    AND
2. NCSE Confirmation:
    a. A letter from the NCSE, relevant to the 2027/28 school year, confirming that the child is known to them and that the child has the required diagnosis and recommendation for a special school.

3. Children who are aged 4 years or older on the 31st August of the year of proposed admission or who have not yet turned 18 years on the 31st August of the year of proposed entry.

** A professional in this context is a chartered psychologist, psychiatrist, or multidisciplinary team including a psychologist or psychiatrist.

This school shall admit each student seeking admission except where –

(a) the school is oversubscribed (please see section 6 below for further details)
(b) a parent of a student, when required by the principal in accordance with section 23(4) of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, fails to confirm in writing that the code of behaviour of the school

is acceptable to him or her and that he or she shall make all reasonable efforts to ensure compliance with such code by the student

(c) Saplings Carlow provides an education exclusively for students with a primary diagnosis of autism and complex needs and may refuse admission to a student, where the student does not have the specified category of special educational needs provided for by this school.

(d) the applicant fails to confirm acceptance of an offer by the specified deadline or fails to comply with the acceptance of offer requirements as detailed in the annual admissions notice.

(e) the required supporting documentation outlined above (professional reports, NCSE letter of eligibility for the year concerned, proof of address, birth certificate) are not submitted or missing.

(f) The student has not reached age of 4 on the 31st August of the year of proposed admission or where the child has already reached the age of 18 on the 31st August of the year of proposed entry.

Application Process

- Parents/guardians must return a completed Application form along with supporting documentation. Completed Application forms and supporting documentation can be submitted from 9 a.m. on the opening day outlined in the annual admissions notice.
- The closing date for receipt of completed Application forms and all required supporting documentation is 14:40 on the closing date as outlined in the Admissions Notice.

The following supporting documentation is required alongside a completed application form:

- NCSE Eligibility Letter for 2027/28.
- Professional report(s) as described above.
- Original Birth Certificate.
- Two proofs of address (e.g. utility bills dated within the past six months).

Please note: Availability of places in the school is generally determined by the number of school leavers in the preceding school year. Parents can find additional information on the schools Admissions Notice for the relevant school year. If the number of places available is equal to the number of applicants meeting the Admissions Criteria, the school will admit all applicants regardless of school level e.g. Primary or Post-Primary. In the case of oversubscription please see below.

Important: Confirmation of receipt of Application forms/documentation is not an indication of a secured placement.

Application forms and associated paperwork will only be kept on file for **one academic year,** after which time they are **shredded.** Parents/guardians must **reapply on a yearly basis,** until such time as a placement is secured or no longer required.

6. Oversubscription

In the event that the school is oversubscribed, the school will, when deciding on applications for admission, apply the following selection criteria in the order listed below to those applications that meet the admissions criteria as set out in section 5 and received within the timeline for receipt of application forms and required documentation as set out in the school's annual admission notice:

- **Category 1:** Siblings of children currently in the school (including step-siblings and foster children resident at the same address).
- **Category 2:** Availability of places in the appropriate level. Saplings Special School caters for both Primary and Post-Primary Level. In order to maintain appropriate class groupings the number of places available at each level, Primary or Post-Primary, may change each year depending on the number of current students enrolled in the school in each level. Applications in this category will be separated based on the following definitions:
    - Saplings defines 'Primary Level' as those aged 4 years or older and who have not yet turned 13 years on the 31st August in the year of proposed admission, regardless of education history.
    - Saplings defines 'Post-Primary Level' as those aged 13 years or older and who have not yet turned 18 years on the 31st August in the year of proposed admission, regardless of education history.

In the event that there are two or more students tied for a place or places in any of the selection criteria categories above (the number of applicants exceeds the number of remaining places), the following arrangements will apply:

- Priority will be given to children residing closest to the school. Applicants in this category will be placed on the waiting list behind applicants from category 1 and 2 above. Distance will be determined by the shortest route by public road between the child's home eircode, as provided on the Application form and verified by 2 proofs of address, and the school's eircode (R93 P2X3) using 'Google Maps' with the 'Driving' option selected.
- Where a tie remains, places will be awarded based on random selection through a monitored lottery by an Admissions sub committee of the Board of Management.

Please note:

- fulfilling the Admissions criteria does not guarantee enrolment if sufficient places are not available and/or sufficient classroom space is not available.

- **This oversubscription list will remain valid for the school year in which admission is being sought, following which all Application forms and documentation will be shredded.**

7. What will not be considered or taken into account

In accordance with section 62(7)(e) of the Education Act, the school will not consider or take into account any of the following in deciding on applications for admission or when placing a student on a waiting list for admission to the school:

(a) a student's prior attendance at a pre-school or pre-school service, including naíonraí.
(b) the payment of fees or contributions (howsoever described) to the school;
(c) a student's academic ability, skills or aptitude; other than in relation to:
    (i) Admission to a special school insofar as it is necessary in order to ascertain whether or not the student has the category of special educational needs concerned
(d) the occupation, financial status, academic ability, skills or aptitude of a student's parents;
(e) a requirement that a student, or his or her parents, attend an interview, open day or other meeting as a condition of admission;
(f) a student's connection to the school by virtue of a member of his or her family attending or having previously attended the school; other than, in the case of the inclusion of selection criteria based on siblings of a student currently attending the school;
(g) the date and time on which an application for admission was received by the school,

This is subject to the application being received at any time during the period specified for receiving applications set out in the annual admission notice of the school for the school year concerned.

8. Decisions on applications

All decisions on applications for admission to Saplings Carlow will be based on the following:

- Our school's admission policy
- The school's annual admission notice
- The information provided by the applicant in the school's official application form, supporting documentation and NCSE eligibility letter, received during the period specified in our annual admission notice for receiving applications and supporting documents.

(Please see section 14 below in relation to applications received outside of the admissions period and section 15 below in relation to applications for places in years other than the intake group.)

Selection criteria that are not included in our school admission policy will not be used to make a decision on an application for a place in our school.

9. Notifying applicants of decisions

Applicants will be informed in writing as to the decision of the school, within the timeline outlined in the annual Admissions Notice.

If a student is not offered a place in our school, the reasons why they were not offered a place will be communicated in writing to the applicant, including, where applicable, details of the student's ranking against the selection criteria and details fo the student's place on the waiting list of the school year concerned.

Applicants will be informed of the right to see a review/right of appeal of the school's decision (see section 18 below for further details).

10. Acceptance of an offer of a place by an applicant

In accepting an offer of admission from Saplings Carlow, you must indicate—

(i) whether or not you have accepted an offer of admission for another school or schools. If you have accepted such an offer, you must also provide details of the offer or offers concerned and

(ii) whether or not you have applied for and awaiting confirmation of an offer of admission from another school or schools, and if so, you must provide details of the other school or schools concerned.

(iii) Acceptance of the offer within **5 school days** of receiving the offer.

11. Circumstances in which offers may not be made or may be withdrawn

An offer of admission may not be made or may be withdrawn by Saplings Carlow where—

(i) it is established that information contained in the application is false or misleading.
(ii) an applicant fails to confirm acceptance of an offer of admission on or before the date set out in the annual admission notice of the school.
(iii) the parent of a student, when required by the principal in accordance with section 23(4) of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, fails to confirm in writing that the code of behaviour of the school is acceptable to him or her and that he or she shall make all reasonable efforts to ensure compliance with such code by the student; or
(iv) an applicant has failed to comply with the requirements of 'acceptance of an offer' as set out in section 10 above.
(v) Documentation in support of the application is not provided.

12. Sharing of Data with other schools

Applicants should be aware that section 66(6) of the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 allows for the sharing of certain information between schools in order to facilitate the efficient admission of students.

Section 66(6) allows a school to provide a patron or another board of management with a list of the students in relation to whom—

- an application for admission to the school has been received,
- an offer of admission to the school has been made, or
- an offer of admission to the school has been accepted.

The list may include any or all of the following:

- the date on which an application for admission was received by the school;
- the date on which an offer of admission was made by the school;
- the date on which an offer of admission was accepted by an applicant;
- a student's personal details including his or her name, address, date of birth and personal public service number (within the meaning of section 262 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005).

13. Waiting list in the event of oversubscription

In the event of there being more applications to the school year concerned than places available, a waiting list of students whose applications for admission to Saplings Carlow were unsuccessful due to the school being oversubscribed will be compiled and will remain valid for the school year in which admission is being sought.

Placement on the waiting list of Saplings Carlow is in the order of priority assigned to the students' applications after the school has applied the selection criteria in accordance with this admission policy.

Offers of any subsequent places that become available for and during the current school year in relation to which admission is being sought will be made to those students on the waiting list, in accordance with the order of priority in relation to which the students have been placed on the list.

14. Late Applications

Late applications, those where the Application form and/or required documentation is not received by the specified deadlines as per the annual admissions notice, will be accepted but will be placed on the waiting list after all timely applications have been considered in accordance with the Admissions Policy. It is the responsibility of the parent(s) guardian(s) to ensure that all supporting documentation is correct/up to date and received by the school within the specified time frame/application deadline.

15. Procedures for admission of students to other years and during the school year

The procedures of the school in relation to the admission of students who are not already admitted to the school, after the commencement of the school year in which admission is sought, are as follows:

1. Offers of any subsequent places that become available mid-year of the school year in relation to which admission is being sought will be made to those students on the waiting list, however, in this instance, priority will be given to the age of children most suited to the age of the class in which a space has become available.

16. Declaration in relation to the non-charging of fees

The board of Saplings Carlow or any persons acting on its behalf will not charge fees for or seek payment or contributions (howsoever described) as a condition of-

(a) an application for admission of a student to the school, or
(b) the admission or continued enrolment of a student in the school.

17. Arrangements regarding students not attending religious instruction

Saplings Special School is a non-denominational ethos school and in keeping with that ethos, children of all faiths or none are welcome to apply to the school. The school does not offer classes or individual instruction in any faith.

18. Reviews/appeals

Review of decisions by the Board of Management

The parent of the student, or in the case of a student who has reached the age of 18 years, the student, may request the board to review a decision to refuse admission. Such requests must be made in accordance with Section 29C of the Education Act 1998.

The timeline within which such a review must be requested and the other requirements applicable to such reviews are set out in the procedures determined by the Minister under section 29B of the Education Act 1998 which are published on the website of the Department of Education and Skills.

The board will conduct such reviews in accordance with the requirements of the procedures determined under Section 29B and with section 29C of the Education Act 1998.

Note: Where an applicant has been refused admission due to the school being oversubscribed, the applicant **must request a review** of that decision by the board of management prior to making an appeal under section 29 of the Education Act 1998.

Where an applicant has been refused admission due to a reason other than the school being oversubscribed, the applicant **may request a review** of that decision by the board of management prior to making an appeal under section 29 of the Education Act 1998.

Right of appeal

Under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998, the parent of the student, or in the case of a student who has reached the age of 18 years, the student, may appeal a decision of this school to refuse admission.

An appeal may be made under Section 29 (1)(c)(i) of the Education Act 1998 where the refusal to admit was due to the school being oversubscribed.

An appeal may be made under Section 29 (1)(c)(ii) of the Education Act 1998 where the refusal to admit was due a reason other than the school being oversubscribed.

Where an applicant has been refused admission due to the school being oversubscribed, the applicant **must request a review** of that decision by the board of management **prior to making an appeal** under section 29 of the Education Act 1998. (see Review of decisions by the Board of Management)

Where an applicant has been refused admission due to a reason other than the school being oversubscribed, the applicant **may request a review** of that decision by the board of management prior to making an appeal under section 29 of the Education Act 1998. (see Review of decisions by the Board of Management)

Appeals under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 will be considered and determined by an independent appeals committee appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills.

The timeline within which such an appeal must be made and the other requirements applicable to such appeals are set out in the procedures determined by the Minister under section 29B of the Education Act 1998 which are published on the website of the Department of Education and Skills.

19. Induction of New Students

It may be necessary to introduce new students on a phased basis depending on their previous experience/history of school attendance e.g. students starting primary school for the first time or students transitioning from a school where they were attending on a reduced day. These students may not initially be expected to complete a full school day. This will allow the new student time to settle into the school setting gradually and successfully. This transition plan will be devised by our Behaviour Specialist in consultation with parents/guardians and will be timebound to support their transition to full school days as soon as possible.

The first year will be used to:

- Assess the child's educational needs.

- Begin to establish a behaviour Support Plan where required.
- Develop a School Support File to address identified needs.

20. 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 1st in any year will be permitted to complete that academic year. This means a June discharge in the following year. In line with NCSE Guidelines for Setting Up and Organising Special Classes, the student's placement in a special class should be regularly reviewed to ensure that a special class placement continues to be the most appropriate school placement.

21. Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

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, such refusal shall be communicated to the Board at the earliest opportunity.

This policy will be amended and reviewed annually with particular emphasis placed upon

- Effective management placed on the application process
- Clarity and transparency relating to the process
- Applicants informed in good time relating to their application
- Positive parental feedback
- Current Department of Education circulars and guidance

22. Policy Ratification

An Admissions policy was first ratified by the Board of Management of Saplings School on the 31/1/2017

This policy was last reviewed in 6th October 2026

Signed:_____- (Chairperson)

Date: _____

Review Date: September 2027