ST. PATRICK'S CLASSICAL SCHOOL

Behaviour Policy for Students with Autism – ASD Class

1. Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to provide a structured, supportive, and legally compliant framework for promoting positive behaviour among students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the ASD Class. It aims to ensure that all students can access education in a safe, predictable, and nurturing environment while recognising the unique sensory, communication, social, and emotional needs associated with ASD.

Mission Statement:
"Students are more likely to benefit from their education and to be happy in a structured, caring environment where high standards of behaviour are expected and adhered to."

Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools, p.36 (NEWB)

2. Rationale

This policy is rooted in the school's mission statement, which is to educate its students according to the best traditions and highest standards of Catholic schooling. It endeavours at all times to provide, through as wide, as varied and as balanced a curriculum as is possible, for the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, social, cultural and moral development of all its students.
St Patrick's Classical School is committed to ensuring that the core Catholic values of promoting spiritual and human development, achieving quality in learning and teaching, showing respect for every person and oneself, creating community, being just and responsible are all enshrined in the school's code of behaviour.

This policy supports the understanding that;

- All behaviour is a form of communication.
- Students with ASD require consistent, individualised, and proactive support to understand expectations, regulate emotions, and manage sensory input.
- A calm environment promotes wellbeing and learning.

3. Legislative and Policy Framework

This policy seeks to be aligned with all relevant Irish education legislation and national guidelines, including:

Key Legislation

- **Education Act 1998** – outlines the responsibility of schools to provide an appropriate education for all students and promote their wellbeing.
- **Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004** – mandates appropriate education and Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for students with special educational needs.
- **Disability Act 2005** – requires reasonable accommodations and accessibility for students with disabilities.
- **Children First Act 2015** – sets child-protection requirements and ensures the safety and welfare of students.
- **Equal Status Acts 2000–2018** – prohibit discrimination and ensure equal access to education for students with disabilities.
- **Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005** – requires safe working and learning environments for staff and students.

National Guidelines / Department Policy

- NCSE Guidelines on Supporting Students with Autism (various publications)
- NEPS Continuum of Support
- Department of Education – Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties Guidelines
- Use of Reasonable Force / Physical Intervention Guidance (DES Circulars)

4. Aims of the ASD Unit Behaviour Policy

This policy aims to:

1. Promote positive, socially meaningful behaviour through structured teaching, visual supports, and predictable routines.
2. Reduce incidents of distress, dysregulation, aggressive behaviour, and self-harm by identifying triggers early.
3. Support students in developing self-regulation and communication skills.
4. Provide staff with clear, evidence-based strategies and a consistent approach.
5. Ensure the safety, dignity, and wellbeing of all students and staff.

6. Comply with Irish legislation and best-practice guidelines in special education.
7. Foster effective collaboration with parents / guardians, multidisciplinary teams, and external agencies.

5. Understanding Behaviour in ASD

Students with ASD may exhibit behaviours that arise from:

- Communication difficulties
- Sensory overload or under-stimulation
- Anxiety or emotional dysregulation
- Changes to routine
- Social misunderstandings
- Difficulty with abstract instructions
- Processing delays

Staff recognise that such behaviours are often needs-based rather than intentional.

6. Proactive Support Strategies

The Unit uses proactive, preventative approaches including:

1. Individualised Planning

- IEPs and Student Support Plans (NEPS Continuum)
- Behaviour Support Plans for identified needs

2. Structured Teaching

- Clear routines
- Visual timetables
- Boardmaker

3. Communication Supports

- Lámh, AAC devices, Social Stories, scripted language, visuals/boardmaker

4. Sensory Supports

- Access to sensory room
- Box of fidgets
- Movement breaks
- Music
- Wellbeing walks

5. Emotional Regulation Supports

- Zones of Regulation in room/outside room
- Calm-down plans
- Safe spaces
- Wellbeing Walks
- Choice Board

6. Environmental Adjustments

- Low-arousal classrooms
- Predictable transitions/change in routines
- Minimal sensory distractions
- Sensory room

7. Stepped Approach to Responding to Challenging or Aggressive Behaviour

The following staged response ensures consistency, safety, and respect.

Stage 1 – Prevention & Early Intervention

Staff will:

- Identify early signs of distress (e.g., pacing, vocalisations, withdrawal).
- Reduce demands, offer breaks, or modify activities.
- Use calm, neutral language and visual cues.
- Redirect or offer alternative tasks.
- Provide access to sensory support/room.

Goal: prevent escalation.

Stage 2 – Crisis De-escalation

If behaviour begins to escalate:

- Reduce verbal input and avoid confrontation.
- Maintain a calm tone and body language.
- Remove triggers where possible (noise, crowding, transitions).
- Offer the student access to their designated "safe space"/sensory room.
- Use de-escalation scripts or visuals (e.g., "Take a break", "Visuals").

At this stage, the focus is on safety, not instruction.

Stage 3 – Managing Aggressive/High-Risk Behaviour

Used only when behaviour poses immediate risk of harm to the student or others.

- Ensure other students are removed from the area if necessary.
- The teacher will instruct the SNA to request a member of the Management Team to come to the unit if their assistance is required.
- Staff may use reasonable force only as permitted under Department of Education guidance—the minimum force necessary, for the shortest time, to prevent harm.
- Staff will maintain dignity, offer reassurance, and continuously monitor wellbeing.
- Incident/s will be recorded on VSware for the attention of the Principal, the shared folder and incident shared via the communication book or phone call to the parents/guardians.

Stage 4 – Post-Incident Support and Review

After the incident:

For the student

- Provide a quiet, supportive recovery space.
- Allow time for regulation before discussing the event.
- Use social stories, visuals, or reflection tools appropriate to the student's developmental level.

For staff

- Staff debrief and record events factually.
- Identify triggers, patterns, and strategies that were or were not effective.

For parents/guardians

- Inform parents in accordance with school policy.
- Collaborate on next steps or updated strategies.

Review

- Update Behaviour Support Plan if required.
- Consider referral to NEPS, OT, Speech & Language Therapy, or NCSE support services.

8. Communication and Collaboration

The ASD class recognises that consistency across home and school environments supports positive behaviour.

The school will:

- Engage in regular communication with parents via the Communication Book,phone calls and meetings when required.
- Seek parental input for behaviour support plans.
- Liaise with NEPS, therapists, and other professionals.
- Share strategies, progress, and concerns.

9. Roles and Responsibilities

ASD Class Staff

- Implement individualised behaviour supports and plans.
- Maintain records of incidents and interventions.
- Participate in training and reflective practice.
- Work collaboratively with colleagues and external professionals.

School Leadership

- Ensure appropriate staffing and training.
- Provide facilities for sensory regulation and safe spaces.
- Support staff in implementing the policy.

Parents / Guardians

- Share relevant information about the child's needs.
- Support agreed strategies at home where possible.
- Attend review meetings.

10. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be:

- Reviewed annually or earlier if required.
- Evaluated based on behaviour logs (VSware and other), staff feedback, and student progress.
- Updated in line with changes to legislation or Department of Education guidelines.

11. Ratification

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management of St. Patrick's Classical School and will be reviewed on a regular basis.

The Board of Management approved and ratified the Policy on the;

Signed: _F. Gerry Stuart_   Signed:

Gerry Stuart   Mr. Harry Mc Garry

Chairperson of Board of Management   Principal/Secretary to the Board of Management

Date: 26/1/2026   Date: 26/1/2026

Appendix 1

The school has consulted the Geoff Colvin Model and National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) resources in creating this school policy.

Phases of Acting Out Behaviour

Early phases focus on teaching and prevention.

Intensity

Time

1. Calm
2. Trigger
3. Agitation
4. Acceleration
5. Peak
6. De-Escalation
7. Recovery

Later phases focus on safety, crisis management, reentry and follow up.

UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING ESCALATING BEHAVIOUR

The Acting Out Cycle

Understanding how behaviour problems escalate and when and how to intervene is a key factor in effective classroom management. Behaviour problems often follow a predictable pattern of escalation leading to an outburst. Geoff Colvin's model of the phases of acting out behaviour demonstrates how the intensity builds and accelerates into a peak and then subsides.

Phases of Acting Out Behaviour
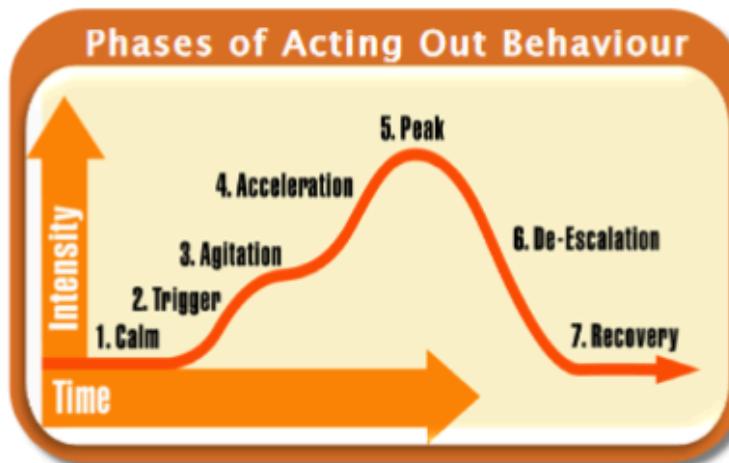
This seven stage model provides insight into what happens when a student's behaviour escalates or heightens. The behaviour may appear to come out of nowhere and without an obvious trigger but there is a pattern as well as strategies that can be used at the early stages that may deescalate the situation. Escalating behaviour is a phase in a chain of problem behaviour and intervening early in the behavioural chain can disrupt the whole chain.

The following pages provide an overview of the seven phases, preventative strategies that may decrease the occurrence of escalating behaviour and ways to intervene during each phase of the cycle.

Three Main Goals in Correcting Behaviour

1. Interrupt the problem behaviour, and engage the student in the expected behaviour.

2. Ensure the student or students exhibit the expected behaviour in future occurrences of similar situations.

3. Avoid escalating the situation to more serious behaviour.

Colvin, 2010

NBSS