RELATE POLICY

School Address*: Our Lady of Good Counsel School,*

Innishmore, Ballincollig, Cork. P31FH22

Phone number: *0214878370*

Roll number: *18208A*

School Patron: *The Bishop of Cork and Ross, Bishop Fintan Gavin*.

Principal: *Aisling Power*.

Deputy Principal: *Nollaig Moynihan.*

Chairperson: *Billy Murphy.*

Draft circulated to staff on 14/10/2026 for review:

Policy ratified by the Board on :

1. Relate Policy Statement

The Board of Management and staff are committed to creating inclusive, accessible, sensory-responsive and communication-friendly learning environments that enable every pupil to participate, communicate, regulate, learn and achieve to the fullest extent possible. This policy is informed by the principles outlined in the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) resources *Sensory Spaces in Schools* (2025), *Visual Supports within an Inclusive Learning Environment* (2024), and *The Physical Classroom Environment: Creating Universal Learning Spaces* (2024).

The school recognises that pupils with moderate general learning disabilities and complex needs experience and process their environments in different ways. Learning environments must therefore be intentionally designed to reduce barriers, support regulation, promote communication and maximise engagement for all learners.

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2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Promote inclusive educational practice across all learning environments.
- Ensure consistent use of visual supports throughout the school.
- Establish procedures for the effective use of sensory spaces.
- Support sensory regulation and emotional wellbeing.
- Create physically accessible and universally designed classrooms.
- Enhance communication, participation and independence.
- Support staff in implementing evidence-informed practices.

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3. Guiding Principles

The school will:

3.1 Adopt a Neurodiversity-Affirming Approach

The school recognises and values neurological differences and aims to create environments that respect individual sensory, communication and learning profiles

3.2 Promote Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Teaching, communication and environmental design shall be planned proactively to meet diverse learner needs rather than relying solely on individual accommodations. Visual supports are considered a universal support benefiting all pupils.

3.3 Student-Centred Practice

Pupil voice, observation, assessment information, family input and multidisciplinary recommendations will inform environmental adaptations and support plans

3.4 Participation and Belonging

All pupils have the right to access communication, learning opportunities, social engagement and meaningful participation within the school community.

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4. Visual Supports Policy

4.1 Rationale

Visual supports enhance understanding, predictability, participation, communication, independence and emotional security. They reduce processing demands and support pupils in understanding expectations and routines. Visuals are an essential component of a Total Communication Approach

4.2 Whole-School Implementation

Visual supports shall be used consistently throughout:

- Classrooms
- Corridors
- Toilets
- Therapy spaces
- Sensory rooms
- Outdoor learning areas
- School offices and reception areas

A consistent visual language across the school will support pupil understanding and independence.

4.3 Types of Visual Supports

The school may utilise:

Environmental Visuals

- Room labels
- Signage
- Colour-coded areas

Organisational Visuals

- Daily schedules
- First/Then boards
- Timetables
- Choice boards
- Core-boards

Communication Supports

- Object cues
- Photographs
- Symbol systems
- AAC supports
- Communication boards
- Core-boards

Behaviour and Regulation Supports

- Emotional regulation scales
- Social stories.
- Visual rules
- Transition supports
- Coping strategy visuals

4.4 Staff Responsibilities

Staff will:

- Model use of visual supports consistently. Visual lanyards are available for all staff, SNAs, Teachers, Escorts, MDT, ancillary and substitute staff.
- Ensure visuals are meaningful and individualised.
- Review and update visuals regularly.
- Promote use of visuals across all settings.
- Collaborate with speech and language therapists and families.

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5. Physical Classroom Environment

5.1 Principles

Classrooms shall be organised to maximise participation while minimising sensory barriers. Physical environments should be predictable, structured, calm and flexible.

5.2 Sensory Comfort

Staff will regularly consider:

Visual Environment

- Appropriate lighting
- Reduction of visual clutter
- Clearly defined spaces
- Appropriate displays
- Neutral background areas where possible

Auditory Environment

- Reduction of unnecessary noise
- Use of soft furnishings where appropriate
- Quiet zones within classrooms

Sensory Regulation

- Access to movement opportunities, ie Blue Breaks
- Sensory equipment as recommended
- Calm spaces
- Individual sensory regulation.

5.3 Organisation and Zoning

Classrooms shall provide clearly identified areas for:

- Group teaching
- Individual learning
- Communication activities
- Play
- Sensory regulation
- Independent work
- Life skills activities

Visual boundaries, furniture arrangement and environmental cues will support understanding and independence.

5.4 Flexible Learning Spaces

Teachers are encouraged to offer:

- Floor learning opportunities
- Alternative seating
- Standing workstations
- Active seating options
- Sensory-friendly workspaces to support engagement and participation.

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6. Sensory Spaces

6.1 Purpose

Sensory spaces provide pupils with opportunities for regulation, recovery, sensory balance and emotional wellbeing.

6.2 Philosophy

Sensory spaces will operate within a proactive, pupil-centred framework.

Use of a sensory space should:

- Support self-regulation.
- Address identified sensory needs.
- Promote wellbeing.
- Facilitate successful return to learning.

Sensory spaces must never be used as a consequence for behaviour or as a form of isolation.

6.3 Access

Access may be:

- Planned within individual support plans.
- Requested by pupils using their preferred communication method.
- Facilitated by staff based on observed need.

The duration and frequency of use will be guided by individual pupil profiles and professional recommendations.

6.4 Adult Role

Staff using sensory spaces will:

- Observe and support regulation.
- Follow individual sensory plans where available.
- Promote self-awareness and self-advocacy.
- Maintain pupil dignity and safety.
- Encourage gradual return to participation.

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7. Communication and Total Communication Approach

The school adopts a Total Communication Approach recognising all forms of communication including:

- Speech
- Lámh
- Gestures
- Body language
- Objects of reference
- Symbols
- Photographs
- Communication books
- Electronic AAC systems

All communication attempts will be acknowledged, respected and supported.

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8. Health, Safety and Safeguarding

The school will ensure that:

- Sensory equipment is maintained appropriately.
- Risk assessments are undertaken where required.
- Sensory spaces are supervised in accordance with safeguarding procedures.
- Environmental modifications comply with health and safety regulations.
- Accessibility requirements are considered in all learning environments.

9. Staff Development

The school is committed to ongoing professional learning in:

- Universal Design for Learning
- Total Communication Approaches
- Lámh
- AAC
- Sensory processing and regulation
- Neurodiversity-affirming practice
- Inclusive classroom design

Staff will be encouraged to utilise NCSE guidance and professional development opportunities.

Staff will be encouraged to avail of NCSE Courses targeting the neuro-divergent learner within the classroom setting.

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10. Monitoring and Review

This policy shall be:

- Reviewed every three years or sooner if required.
- Evaluated through classroom observations, pupil participation data, staff feedback, parent feedback and multidisciplinary input.
- Updated in line with emerging best practice and NCSE guidance.

References

- National Council for Special Education. *Sensory Spaces in Schools* (2025).
- National Council for Special Education. *Visual Supports within an Inclusive Learning Environment* (2024).

- National Council for Special Education. *The Physical Classroom Environment: Creating Universal Learning Spaces* (2024).

This policy should be read in conjunction with the school's Communication Policy, Positive Behaviour Support Policy, Health and Safety Statement, and Child Safeguarding Statement