

Catherine McAuley School
Enrolment / Admissions Policy

Approved by the Board of Management

Section A. General Information

General Introduction

This enrolment policy is being set out in accordance with the provisions of the Education Act (1998). The Board of Management trusts that by so doing parents will be assisted in relation to all aspects of applications and enrolment. The Chairperson of the Board of Management, Rev. Fr Past O Sullivan, and the principal teacher, Mr. Greg Browne, will be happy to clarify any further matters arising from the policy.

School Name: Catherine McAuley Special School

**School Address: Ashbourne Avenue
South Circular Road
Limerick**

Telephone No.: 061 228281

Denominational Character: Roman Catholic

Name of Patron: The Bishop of Limerick

Total Number of Teachers in the School:

Principal, _____
19 class teachers, _____
1 Home Economics teacher, _____
3 Vocational Subject teachers

Employed by the BOM
through the DES

Employed by the VEC

16 SNA's

Employed by the BOM
through the DES

2 teachers on partime contracts

Employed by the BOM

2 retired teachers on voluntary work

4 ancillary staff

Employed by the BOM

Background

Catherine McAuley School is a designated special school committed to the holistic education of the pupil whose primary disability is a Mild or Borderline Mild General Disability (i.e. a full scale I.Q. between 50 to 69 or 70 to 79). Appendix II of Circular 8/99 and Appendix II of Circular Sp.Ed. 08/02 lay out such criteria as determined by an educational or clinical psychologist. The school operates under the Rules for Primary Schools laid down by the Department of Education and Skills. The pupil / teacher ratio presently for such pupils is 1 to 11. The school caters for students of primary and post primary ages. It is a co-educational school which presently has an enrolment of one hundred and eighty two pupils.

The school follows the curricular programmes prescribed by the Department of Education and Science, which may be amended from time to time, in accordance with Sections 9 and 30 of the Education Act (1998). The Curriculum for Pupils with Mild General Learning Disabilities is the bedrock of all that is taught, along with the primary School's Curriculum. The school also provides recognised post-primary programmes including the Junior Certificate School Programme, The Junior Certificate, The Leaving Certificate Applied and FETAC Levels I to IV.

The school is financed directly by way of capitation and other grants provided by the Department of Education and Skills. School policy has regard to the resources and funding available. The teaching and SNA staffing is determined by the DES through the NCSE. As special schools are under the primary section of the Department, the lengths of the school day and the school year are equivalent to primary school regulations.

Within the context and parameters of Department regulations and programmes, the rights of the patron as set out in the Education Act (1998), and the funding and resources available, the school supports the principles of:

- Inclusive access to an appropriate curriculum for all pupils;
- Equality of access and participation in all areas of the school life;
- Parental choice in relation to enrolment, provided that the pupil's primary disability is a Mild or Borderline Mild General Learning Disability; and
- Respect for diversity of values, beliefs, traditions, languages and ways of life in society.

Criteria of Entry

The Board of Management has upheld the right of students with a Mild or Borderline Mild General Learning Disability to attend Catherine McAuley School unless other factors militate against a student being suitably placed here. These include:

1. The availability of a place in the school at the age of enrolment of a new pupil,
2. The availability of suitable additional supports and staffing to cater for additional needs that a pupil may have, and which could not reasonably be addressed within the present pupil / teacher or pupil / SNA allocations for special schools for Mild Disability,

While the Board does not have the right to refuse admission to a student with a Mild or Borderline Mild General Disability, never-the-less the Board reserves the right to delay a pupil's entry into the school unless and until the factors outlined above are rectified.

Catherine McAuley School does not provide an educational service to pupils whose primary disability is in one or more of the following areas:

1. Physical or Sensory
2. Emotional or Behavioural
3. Autistic Spectrum Disorder
4. Attention Deficit Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Oppositional Defiance Disorder
5. Any other recognised disorder that can co-occur with a Mild or Borderline Mild General Disability.

However the Board of Management will consider applications for places for pupils with such disabilities provided that such are secondary to a primary disability of Mild or Borderline Mild General Learning Disability. To this end the Board of Management alone reserves the right to establish or to disband specialised units in consultation with the Department and Skills, under the National Council for Special Education for pupils with such secondary disabilities, again provided that such disabilities are secondary to a primary disability of Mild or Borderline Mild General Disability.

As it is designated as a school for pupils with MGLD and Borderline MGLD, the school cannot enrol students, whose primary disability does not fall within the parameters of this disability, including pupils with a borderline Moderate disability or assessed as having Low Average ability. If ambiguity exists as to the exact nature of a prospective pupil's disability, based on unclear reports supplied when enrolment is sought, the BOM reserves the right to determine, through its Enrolment / Admissions Committee, whether a pupil qualifies for Catherine McAuley School. Having accepted a pupil on

the criteria in this policy, the BOM also reserves the right to retain his/her placement in the school should subsequent formal testing determine the pupil's disability to lie outside the designated I.Q. range.

Catchment Area

The aim of Catherine McAuley School is to provide a learning environment, in which each individual is happy, secure, motivated, sensitively challenged, appreciated and fulfilled. The school is committed to promoting a child-centred approach to education where a child's worth is validated but not measured by academic attainments alone. Referrals for entry to the school come from the parents of pupils in both primary and secondary mainstream schools residing in Limerick city and county, east County Clare, North Counties Tipperary and Cork. Applications outside of this catchment area will be considered provided that a similar suitable placement is not available closer to the student at the time of request and that it does not deprive a prospective student within the catchment area of a position. Provision of school transport is not the responsibility of the school, but rests with the DES.

Section B. Enrolment Procedures

The School Enrolment Committee

The Board of Management delegates to its Enrolment Committee the power to apply this policy in a fair and transparent manner when applications for places are sought in the school. The Board has determined that the Enrolment Committee shall consist of three teachers who are permanently employed in the school, including the Principal, Deputy Principal and the teacher representative on the Board of Management. Should the Deputy Principal be the teacher representative, the Board will appoint a teacher from the school's Middle Management to fill the third position. The Enrolment Committee, through the Principal, will report to the BOM on decisions of acceptance or refusal that it has taken. The Board of Management has the ultimate responsibility in regard to enrolments and consequently has the right to accept or reject any decision made on enrolments.

Application Procedure

Applications for enrolment are made in writing. A copy of the enrolment policy will be made available to applicants who cannot access it on the

school's website. On receipt of an application, parents will be asked to furnish the following:

1. An Educational Psychological Assessment which determines the nature of the prospective pupil's disability, which has been completed within two years of the proposed date of entry to the school.
2. Any additional reports and assessments from the pupil's present school or from other professionals which provide help in determining appropriate provision for the pupil.
3. Permission to consult with the pupil's previous school and / or any other professional in relation to the pupil.
4. Permission to seek an independent psychological assessment if required, where a doubt or ambiguity exists as to the disability of a pupil.

On receipt of this information, the Enrolment Committee shall convene at its earliest convenience to access the application. A record of the meetings and decisions of the Enrolment Committee will be kept. In the case of refusals to enrol or a decision to delay enrolment the Committee will note why it came to this decision. The Committee may invite the parents and prospective pupil into the school to discuss the enrolment application.

Having reached a decision based on criteria outlined above, the Enrolment Committee shall convey this firstly to the BOM (or the Chairperson, should the BOM be unable to meet). Parents will then be informed of the decision, subject to approval at the next BOM meeting. Given that numerous applications often occur at any time in the school, the enrolment committee may decide to defer a meeting until it has time to consider several requests all at once. All decisions of the Enrolment Committee will be ratified formally at the next full meeting of the BOM. The Board, through the Principal, will notify parents formally of their decision within 21 days of making it. In exceptional cases, particularly if parents intend to appeal a decision, the Principal will seek an immediate BOM meeting to outline the case and why an enrolment has been deferred or refused.

As a general principle and in so far as practicable having regard to the school's enrolment policy, children will be enrolled on application, provided that there is space available.

Enrolment Time and Age

As a general rule, Catherine McAuley School will accept new students at the beginning of each new school year. However, students may also be

admitted at any point in the school year, subject to the conditions outlined above. As the school is under the primary section of the DES, enrolment age is governed by the Rules for Primary Schools. However, the school has traditionally encouraged parents to allow their son / daughter to experience mainstream education firstly before opting for special school education. This is recommended because:

1. It is often difficult to determine a pupil's specific disability at an early age and
2. The pupil's early education is ideally best served in his / her local community if possible.

The youngest students presently enrolled in the school are nine years of age. While the school does not seek to retain pupils after their eighteenth birthday, the BOM will allow students, subject to the approval of and adequate notice by the DES, to remain on to complete a DES recognised course.

Decision of Acceptance:

Decisions in relation to applications for enrolment are made by the Board of Management, on the advice of the Enrolment Committee and in accordance with school policy. The Board will notify parents of their decision within 21 days of the meeting to ratify applications. The Board will have regard for relevant Department of Education and Science guidelines in relation to class size and staffing provisions and/or any other relevant requirements concerning accommodation, including physical space and the health and welfare of children.

In the event of a place being offered to a pupil, the parents / guardians will be notified in writing. Parents will be furnished with school enrolment forms to complete and forms for the Special Education Needs Officer regarding school transport and additional resources that may be deemed necessary. School policies will also be made available. The decision to accept a new student is then forwarded to the Special Education Needs Officer, along with a copy of the psychological assessment upon which the decision was made and the completed forms in relation to school transport and additional resources. An entry date for the new student is then set.

Implicit in the decision to accept a place in Catherine McAuley School are:

1. An acceptance to abide by all school policies and rules, particularly in relation to Behaviour, Health and Safety and Child Protection,
2. An undertaking by parents / guardians to ensure regular attendance by the pupil at school, with proper notice of absenteeism,

3. A willingness by applicants to disclose all pertinent information and services involved with the new pupil which is relevant to the pupil's successful integration into Catherine McAuley School,
4. An undertaking by parents / guardians (or a person designated by them) to be available at all times in case of emergency and for parent /teacher meetings.
5. An acknowledgement of the responsibility of all students to uphold the good name of the school at all times.

Appeals of a Decision to Refuse Enrolment

The Board of Management of Catherine McAuley School will inform parents / guardians of its decision in writing in respect of an application for enrolment within 21 days. In the event of refusal to enroll, the letter will explain the reason for refusing admission to the school or where a delay on enrolment may be required. The Principal will, if requested, meet with the parents / guardians to explain further the decision of the BOM. The BOM will also inform the parents / guardians of their right to appeal the decision under section 29 of the Education Act (as amended by Section 4 of the Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2007 to the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Science.

In most cases appeals must be dealt with within 30 days. Parents will be informed as to how to access the required information regarding Section 29 of the Education Act (as amended by Section 4 of the Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2007) on the Department's website at www.education.ie Where appropriate, the Secretary General may give whatever directions to the Board of Management that are considered necessary to remedy the matter complained of.

The BOM will instruct the Enrolment Committee to prepare a response if and when an appeal is being investigated by the DES (Section 12, Circular 22/02 – Processing of an Appeal) and allow the Enrolment Committee to seek whatever professional advice it deems necessary. The BOM will also appoint a panel of three persons to represent the school at a hearing, including the Chairperson and Principal.

Provision of Key Information by Parents

Certain information will be required when children are being enrolled. A specific enrolment application form may also be provided by the Board for this purpose. Such information may include:

- Pupil's name, age and address;
- Names and addresses of pupil's parents/guardians;
- Contact telephone numbers;

- Contact telephone numbers in case of emergency;
- Details of any medical conditions which the school should be aware of;
- Religion;
- Previous schools attended, if any, and reasons for transfer, if applicable; and
- Any other relevant information (including any such further information as may be prescribed under the Education Welfare Act (2000) or Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004)).

Where Demand Exceeds Places

In the event that applications for enrolment exceed / are expected to exceed the number of places available the following decision making process will apply. The Board will exercise its discretion in the application of the following criteria. The criteria may include any of the following though not necessarily in that order:

- Availability of places at the age of the applicant
- Date of Application (First come, first served)
- Availability of suitable additional supports and staffing to cater for additional needs that a pupil may have
- Catchment Area;
- Children of staff members;
- Any specific provision for children of ethnic minorities, including travellers, refugees, asylum seekers etc;
- Ethos considerations; and
- Exceptional and unforeseen circumstances

Section 3. Continuity

Ratification:

The BOM has the responsibility for the ratification and regular review of the Enrolment Policy. To this end the Board will ensure that:

- Review of the policy will be carried out by the BOM every two years.
- The policy is available to members of the school community.
- The policy is available to all new applicants for enrolment and all relevant partners in Education,
- In light of ever-changing policies in Education, it will monitor the effectiveness of the policy and make any necessary adjustments.

Circulation:

Once ratified by the BOM, this policy will be available upon request and will also be accessible on the school's website. The BOM will seek to promote the school and the service it provides in the school catchment area through various media and open-days.

Conclusion

Since its founding in 1961, Catherine McAuley School has catered for the needs of students with Mild or Borderline Mild General Learning Disabilities. It is the intention of the BOM not to deviate from this path and to provide an excellence in its approach to the education of pupils with learning difficulties. While the government policies and national trends have impacted on enrolment over the years, never-the-less the school has remained consistent and faithful to its ethos and philosophy, guided by the Christian principles of its founding Sisters of Mercy.