St Bríd's Special School Admissions Policy

Revised for Circular 0063/2026 and the 2027/2028 admissions cycle

Policy control	Details
School	St Bríd's Special School
Roll number	19375B
Address	Pavilion Road, Castlebar, Co. Mayo, F23 NX99
Telephone	094 9022650
Email	office@stbrids.ie
Website	stbrids.ie
Patron	Western Care Association
Ratified by Board	November 2026
Effective from	November 2026
Next review	Annually and following relevant legislative, Department or NCSE change
Policy owner	Board of Management

Status: Board-ready draft for patron approval and Board ratification. Dates and signatures must be completed before publication.

Document purpose and key decision

This policy sets out the transparent, lawful and non-discriminatory arrangements by which St Bríd's Special School will receive, assess and decide applications for admission. It retains the statutory admissions framework of the January 2026 policy while removing conditions that could prevent an eligible child or young person from accessing an available specialist placement.

For admission to the 2027/2028 school year, an NCSE Letter of Eligibility for that school year is a prerequisite for enrolment. The school will not require professional reports to have been written within a specified recent period; will not use prospective behaviour, prior expulsion, perceived ability to tolerate a class, or the availability of particular resources or expertise as admission barriers; and will reconfigure class groupings, where necessary and practicable within its approved designation and capacity, so that available school places are offered and filled.

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1 Legal and policy framework

This policy is made by the Board of Management in accordance with:

- the Education Act 1998, as amended, including sections 29, 29B, 29C, 61, 62, 63, 64, 66 and 67 as applicable;
- the Education Admission to Schools Act 2018;
- the Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2018;
- the Education Welfare Act 2000, including section 23(4);
- the Disability Act 2005 and applicable equality and data-protection law;
- Department of Education and Youth Circular 0063/2026, National Council for Special Education Parents Notify process to determine the level of need for special education places for the 2027/2028 school year;
- the eligibility criteria referenced in Circular 0039/2025, which Circular 0063/2026 confirms remain unchanged; and
- current Department and NCSE guidance on admission to special schools, annual admission notices, reviews and appeals.

Where legislation, a Ministerial direction, a Department circular or binding procedure changes, the Board will apply the current requirement and amend this policy at the earliest practicable opportunity.

2 School identity characteristic spirit and objectives

St Bríd's is a co-educational special school under the patronage of Western Care Association. It provides education for pupils aged 4 to 18 within the category of special educational need specified in section 4. Pupils may also have additional communication, sensory, physical, medical, emotional, behavioural or care needs.

The school seeks to provide a safe, caring, respectful and inclusive learning environment in which each pupil is supported towards their full potential. The school values partnership with pupils, parents and guardians, staff, the patron, the NCSE and relevant professionals. Its motto is Empowerment Towards Full Potential.

The school provides primary and post-primary education. Curriculum and learning programmes are selected and differentiated having regard to each pupil's age, strengths and identified needs, and may include the Primary Curriculum Framework, NCCA guidance for pupils with moderate and severe to profound general learning disabilities, Junior Cycle Level 1 Learning Programmes and other approved programmes appropriate to the pupil cohort.

3 Scope and guiding principles

This policy applies to all applications for admission, including applications made during the annual admissions period and applications made after the school year has commenced.

3.1 Statutory Admissions Statement

St Bríd's Special School shall not discriminate in its admission of a student to the school on any of the following grounds in respect of the student or the applicant: gender; civil status; family status; sexual orientation; religion; disability; race; membership of the Traveller community; or special educational needs. These grounds and the term "discriminate" shall be construed in accordance with section 3 of the Equal Status Act 2000, as amended.

As a school approved by the Minister to provide education exclusively for students with specified categories of special educational needs, St Bríd's Special School may refuse to admit a student who does not have the category or categories of special educational needs for which the school is approved, as set out in section 4 of this policy.

St Bríd's Special School shall 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.

St Bríd's Special School shall comply with any direction served on the patron or the Board of Management, as the case may be, under section 37A of the Education Act 1998, as amended, and any direction served on the Board under section 67(4B) of that Act.

3.2 Guiding principles

The Board will administer admissions according to the following principles:

- every application will be considered fairly, consistently and only by reference to this policy, the annual admission notice and the information properly required on the application form;
- an eligible applicant will not be prevented from accessing an available place through a criterion relating to prospective behaviour, previous school exclusion, perceived suitability for a particular existing class group, or the availability of additional resources;
- the school will not require attendance at a visit, interview, open day, assessment or meeting as a condition of admission;
- requests for additional educational or clinical information after an offer are for transition, planning, health and safety and educational-support purposes, not to reconsider eligibility or withdraw the place;
- available capacity will be identified across the school, not solely within a pre-existing destination class; and
- the pupil's best interests, dignity and right to access education will inform implementation of the policy.

4 Category of special educational needs catered for

St Bríd's Special School is recognised to provide education for pupils with moderate, severe or profound general learning disability where the child or young person meets the applicable NCSE eligibility criteria for a special-school placement within the school's approved designation.

Eligibility must be evidenced by the documentation required by the NCSE, including:

- professional report or reports confirming the relevant diagnosis;
- evidence in the professional documentation of the complexity of the child or young person's overall level of need;
- a clear professional recommendation, with rationale, that a special-school placement is the most appropriate placement type; and
- an NCSE Letter of Eligibility confirming that the applicant is known to the NCSE and has the required diagnosis and recommendation for a special-school placement.

The school may refuse admission where the applicant does not have the category of special educational need for which the school is approved. Such a refusal will be explained in writing and will include information on review and appeal rights.

No recency limit applies to professional reports. The school will not stipulate that a report must have been prepared within the previous 12 months, two years or any other fixed period. If the NCSE confirms eligibility, the school will not impose additional diagnostic or evidential thresholds.

5 Annual admission arrangements

Each year the Board will publish an Annual Admission Notice in the required form and within the statutory timeframe. The notice will state, at a minimum, the number of places being made available, the dates for applications, the date by which decisions will issue, the acceptance deadline and the number of places offered and accepted in the previous year where required.

The number of available places will be determined by reference to:

- the school's approved accommodation and recognised staffing and pupil-teacher ratios;
- confirmed continuing enrolments, expected leavers and accepted offers;
- the school's approved category of special educational need; and
- the requirement to make all genuine available capacity accessible by reviewing and, where appropriate, reconfiguring class groupings.

The figure in the Annual Admission Notice is an administrative statement of available capacity. It will not be reduced because of an applicant's prospective behaviour, additional disabilities, medical or care needs, or because a particular resource, staff expertise or therapy is not yet available.

6 Application and eligibility process

6.1 Applying to the school

An applicant must submit the school's official application form within the period stated in the Annual Admission Notice. The form will request only information necessary to identify the applicant, communicate with the applicant, establish statutory eligibility, apply the published selection criteria and support lawful administration of the admissions process.

Receipt of an application, inclusion on a list or early contact with the school does not create a priority or guarantee a place. Applications received within the published period are considered together and are not ranked by date or time of receipt.

6.2 NCSE Parents Notify process

Parents and guardians seeking a specialist placement should complete the NCSE Parents Notify process for the relevant school year. For the 2027/2028 school year, Circular 0063/2026 asked parents and guardians to notify the NCSE by 1 September 2026 and provide necessary documentation by 15 September 2026 or as soon as reasonably practicable afterwards. A parent awaiting documentation should notify the NCSE without delay and provide the documentation when available.

Where the school receives an application and the parent or guardian has not notified the NCSE, the school will promptly direct them to the Parents Notify process. Late engagement with the NCSE does not prevent the NCSE from determining eligibility, but may affect the applicant's ability to meet the school's published admissions timeline.

6.3 NCSE Letter of Eligibility

For admission to the 2027/2028 school year, a Letter of Eligibility issued by the NCSE for that school year is a prerequisite for enrolment. A letter applies only to the school year stated in it. If an eligible applicant did not take up a specialist placement in the previous year, a new letter must be obtained for the new admissions year.

The Letter of Eligibility should accompany the application. Where it is pending, the school will record the application and advise the applicant of the outstanding requirement. The school will seek missing information at the earliest opportunity. Recording a pending or incomplete application does not imply a guaranteed place or an indefinite extension of the applicable admissions deadlines. The application can be decided only when the school has sufficient evidence to establish eligibility within

the applicable statutory timeline. The school will not substitute its own additional eligibility test for the NCSE process.

6.4 Student Support Plan and other information

Where a child or young person already attending a school seeks a specialist placement, the NCSE may require the most recent Student Support Plan. The current school and parent or guardian should cooperate with the NCSE in providing it. St Bríd's will not use the absence, format or content of a Student Support Plan as an additional admission criterion once NCSE eligibility is confirmed.

Following an offer, the school may request relevant educational, communication, health, mobility, care and risk-management information to plan a safe and effective transition. A pre-enrolment or transition meeting may be offered for this purpose. Attendance at such a meeting is not a condition of admission.

7 Places class groupings and school capacity

St Bríd's does not operate a single fixed intake class. Applicants may be aged from 4 years to under 18 years on 1 September of the year of entry, subject to the school's approved age range and the applicable rules for continued enrolment.

Class groups are educational and organisational arrangements. They are not separate admissions categories. Pupils may be grouped with regard to chronological age, learning and communication needs, care and health needs, social relationships, curriculum pathway and the overall educational interests of pupils.

The Board and Principal will review whole-school capacity before concluding that the school is oversubscribed. They will consider whether class groups can be reconfigured, while remaining within the school's approved designation, accommodation, recognised staffing arrangements and applicable pupil-teacher ratios. An otherwise available place will not remain unfilled solely because it does not match a pre-existing age band or destination class.

Following the initial offers, the school will continue through the waiting list and, where necessary, across provisional class groupings until all places identified in the Annual Admission Notice are offered and full enrolment is achieved. Final class placement is an operational decision made after admissions decisions and may change during the year in response to educational planning.

The school will consider demand across the full approved age range. Younger children starting school for the first time will not automatically displace older eligible applicants unless such a priority is expressly included in this policy following lawful review and stated in the Annual Admission Notice.

8 Oversubscription and selection criteria

The school is oversubscribed only where the number of eligible applicants exceeds the number of places stated in the Annual Admission Notice after whole-school capacity and possible class reconfiguration have been considered.

Only applicants who meet the eligibility requirements in section 4 and have supplied the information necessary to apply the following criteria will enter the oversubscription process. The criteria will be applied in this order:

Priority	Published selection criterion
1	Eligible applicants ordinarily resident in County Mayo for whom St Bríd's is the nearest suitable special school within its approved designation, based on the applicant's ordinary residence and available NCSE information.
2	All other eligible applicants.

If eligible applicants remain tied within a priority category, places will be allocated by a documented random-selection process overseen by the Principal and an independent witness nominated by the Chairperson. The applicant's name will be entered once. A record of the process and resulting order will be retained.

The Board will review these selection criteria annually with the patron to ensure that they remain lawful, proportionate and do not leave available places unfilled. If a criterion would have that effect, the school will proceed to the next priority category and continue offering places.

9 Matters not considered

The Board of Management, or any person acting on its behalf, shall not, except in accordance with section 64 of the Education Act 1998, as amended, charge fees for or seek payment or contributions, however described, as a condition of an application for admission to the school, or of admission or continued enrolment in the school.

In accordance with section 62(7)(e) of the Education Act 1998 and this policy, the school will not consider or take into account:

- prior attendance at a pre-school or other service;
- payment of fees or contributions;
- academic ability, skills or aptitude, except only insofar as evidence is necessary to establish the category of special educational need;
- the occupation, financial status, academic ability, skills or aptitude of a parent or guardian;
- attendance by the applicant or parent at an interview, meeting, assessment, open day or school visit;
- a family connection with the school;
- the date or time an application was received within the published application period;
- prospective behaviour, a history of dysregulation or aggression, previous suspension or expulsion, or a prediction of risk;
- the applicant's perceived capacity to tolerate a classroom, participate in a particular existing group or benefit from the school's programme;
- the school's current availability of a particular staff member, clinical service, expertise, equipment, transport arrangement or additional resource;
- additional reports or documentation beyond what is necessary to confirm the applicable diagnosis, professional recommendation, NCSE eligibility and the published selection criteria; or
- whether a professional report was written within a specified recent period.

Nothing in this section prevents the school, after admission, from completing individual planning, health-care planning, safeguarding procedures, behaviour support, risk assessment or applications for resources. Those processes support the pupil's education and safety; they do not retrospectively determine entitlement to the place.

10 Decisions and notification

All admission decisions will be based solely on this policy, the Annual Admission Notice and the information provided on the official application form. Unpublished criteria will not be used.

Applicants will be notified in writing within the timeline stated in the Annual Admission Notice. A decision letter will state:

- whether a place is offered;
- the deadline and method for accepting the offer;
- if refused, the specific reason for refusal;
- where oversubscribed, the applicant's ranking under the published criteria and position on the waiting list for that school year; and

- the right to request a Board review and to make an appeal under section 29, including where to obtain the applicable procedures.

An offer relates to admission to St Bríd's, not to an immutable named class, teacher, staff allocation or therapy provision. Class allocation and transition arrangements will be communicated separately.

11 Acceptance withdrawal and waiting lists

11.1 Acceptance

When accepting an offer, the applicant must state whether an offer from another school has been accepted and whether other applications remain pending, giving the details required by law. The parent or guardian must also confirm in writing, when required under section 23(4) of the Education Welfare Act 2000, that the school's Code of Behaviour is acceptable and that reasonable efforts will be made to support the pupil's compliance, having regard to the pupil's age, disability, communication and individual needs.

11.2 When an offer may lapse or be withdrawn

An offer may lapse or be withdrawn only where:

- acceptance is not received by the deadline stated in the Annual Admission Notice;
- material information required to determine eligibility or apply a published selection criterion is established to be false or misleading;
- the statutory confirmation concerning the Code of Behaviour is not provided when required; or
- the acceptance requirements concerning other school offers and applications are not met.

An offer will not be withdrawn because of later receipt of information about behaviour, medical needs, care needs, disability, previous school history or resource requirements. Any such information will be addressed through transition and support planning.

11.3 Waiting list

Where the school is oversubscribed, unsuccessful eligible applicants will be placed on a waiting list in the order produced by the criteria in section 8. If a place becomes available, it will be offered to the next applicant on that list after the school has checked that the applicant continues to seek the place and holds any eligibility letter required for the relevant school year.

The waiting list applies only to the school year concerned and expires at the end of that school year. Inclusion on a waiting list does not confer priority in a later year. A new application and, where required, a new NCSE Letter of Eligibility must be submitted for a later admissions cycle.

12 Late and in year applications

Applications received after the closing date will be considered after all timely applications have been processed. Where places remain, an eligible late applicant may be offered a place. Where no place remains, the applicant will be added to the waiting list in accordance with the selection criteria, without displacing an applicant already ranked following the timely process except where lawfully required.

An application made after the school year begins will be decided within three weeks of receipt of the completed application or within such other statutory period as applies. Before refusing for oversubscription, the school will again consider whole-school capacity and possible reconfiguration. In-year admission is not confined to a vacancy in a predetermined age-range class.

13 NCSE information and reporting requirements

The Principal, acting for the Board, will maintain a documented admissions and capacity-reporting process with the NCSE. The school will:

- provide the NCSE with the names and required details of expected leavers early in the school year and update the information on an ongoing basis;
- respond accurately and promptly to NCSE requests concerning available and anticipated places;
- inform the NCSE within 10 days after a special-school place has been offered and accepted;
- direct applicants who have not used the Parents Notify process to the current NCSE route;
- cooperate, with the appropriate consent and lawful basis, in providing a current Student Support Plan where the NCSE requires it for a child already enrolled in school; and
- retain a dated record of each notification and acknowledgement.

The Board notes that delayed notification of accepted places can negatively affect the timely allocation or review of resources. The 10-day notification is therefore a controlled compliance task, not an optional administrative step.

14 Data protection and information sharing

Personal data collected for admissions will be processed lawfully, fairly and transparently; limited to what is necessary; retained for the applicable period; and protected in accordance with the school's Data Protection Policy, the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Information may be shared with the patron, NCSE, Department, another school or other competent body where authorised or required by law, including the limited information-sharing arrangements under section 66(6) of the Education Act 1998. Health and educational information requested after an offer will be accessed only by those who need it for transition, educational planning, safeguarding, care or safety.

15 Religious instruction

The school respects the constitutional and statutory rights of pupils and parents regarding religious instruction. A parent or guardian, or a student aged 18, may request that the student not attend religious instruction. The school will make reasonable alternative arrangements that do not reduce the student's school day. Participation in sacramental preparation, religious ceremonies or school Masses is not a condition of admission.

16 Reviews and appeals

16.1 Review by the Board of Management

A parent or guardian, or a student aged 18, may request the Board to review a refusal decision under section 29C of the Education Act 1998. The request must follow the procedures and timeframe determined by the Minister under section 29B and available from the Department.

Where refusal is due to oversubscription, a Board review must be requested before an appeal under section 29. Where refusal is for another reason, a Board review may be requested before an appeal. The Board will ensure that any reviewer who was centrally involved in the original decision manages conflicts appropriately and that the review addresses the grounds raised and the published policy.

16.2 Appeal under section 29

A refusal because the school was oversubscribed may be appealed under section 29(1)(c)(i). A refusal for another reason may be appealed under section 29(1)(c)(ii). Appeals are determined by an independent appeals committee appointed by the Minister and must comply with the current

Ministerial procedures and deadlines. Each refusal letter will direct the applicant to the current Department guidance and forms.

17 Roles implementation and monitoring

Role	Core responsibilities under this policy
Board of Management	Adopt and review the policy; approve the Annual Admission Notice; determine applications where required; ensure published criteria alone are used; oversee reviews; monitor capacity, compliance and equality.
Principal	Administer applications; verify that necessary eligibility evidence is present; maintain records; ensure whole-school capacity and reconfiguration are considered; issue decisions; make NCSE notifications; report to the Board.
Admissions administrator or secretary	Log applications and dates; issue acknowledgements; identify missing administrative information; protect records; track acceptance deadlines and the 10-day NCSE notification.
Teachers and relevant staff	Provide transition and educational-planning information after an offer; prepare or update Student Support Plans for current pupils when lawfully required; do not make or promise admission decisions.
Parents guardians and adult applicants	Provide accurate application and eligibility information; engage with the NCSE; meet published deadlines; notify the school of other offers; participate in transition planning after an offer.
NCSE	Operate Parents Notify; determine specialist-placement eligibility; issue the school-year-specific eligibility letter; support forward planning and receive enrolment and vacancy information.

The Principal will report at least annually to the Board on applications, offers, acceptances, refusals and grounds, waiting-list operation, unfilled capacity, NCSE notifications, complaints or appeals, and recommended amendments. Reporting will be anonymised unless individual detail is necessary for the Board's lawful function.

18 Review approval and publication

This policy will be reviewed annually before publication of the Annual Admission Notice and sooner if legislation, Department or NCSE requirements, the school's designation, accommodation or identified compliance risks change. Consultation will be undertaken with staff, parents, the patron and other stakeholders where required and appropriate.

Following patron approval and Board ratification, the policy will be published on the school website and made available in hard copy on request. The application form and Annual Admission Notice will be checked against this policy before publication. No form, letter, webpage or informal practice may introduce an additional admission criterion.

Appendix 1 Circular 0063 2026 compliance checklist

Circular requirement	Policy response	Board check
Direct applicants to NCSE Parents Notify	Sections 6.2 and 13 include referral and operational responsibility.	☐
Annual NCSE Letter of Eligibility for 2027/28	Sections 4 and 6.3 make the relevant-year letter a prerequisite.	☐
Most recent SSP where NCSE requires it	Section 6.4 supports provision without making SSP an extra school criterion.	☐
No report age limit	Sections 4 and 9 expressly prohibit 12-month, two-year or other recency rules.	☐
No prospective-behaviour barrier	Sections 3 and 9 remove behaviour, prior exclusion and predicted-risk criteria.	☐
No resource-contingent admission	Sections 3, 5 and 9 prohibit refusal because resources or expertise are unavailable.	☐
No excessive reports or documentation	Sections 4, 6 and 9 limit evidence to eligibility and published criteria.	☐
Fill all available special-school places	Sections 5, 7, 8 and 12 require whole-school capacity review and continued offers.	☐
Reconfigure class groupings	Section 7 makes groups operational rather than separate admission categories.	☐
Consider broad age range	Sections 7 and 8 avoid automatic priority for younger applicants.	☐
Report expected leavers	Section 13 assigns early and ongoing notification.	☐

Signed for the Board of Management	Signature and date
Chairperson	Signature: _____ Date: _____
Principal and Secretary to the Board	Signature: _____ Date: _____