



evidence based child centred education

Position Statement: Use of Non-Evidence-Based Communication Methods and Access of External Tutors

Introduction

We have been asked by a number of our schools to clarify the position of Autism Ireland schools on two matters:

1. The use of non-evidence-based communication methodologies
2. Requests for access by private tutors/therapists to work with individual pupils within school settings during school hours

Evidence-Based Practice

In line with the Autism Ireland Memorandum and Articles, all educational and therapeutic supports delivered in Autism Ireland schools must be evidence-based.

“The main object for which the Association is established is to promote and provide special schools for children with autism and complex needs together with appropriate therapy supports and to act as an advocacy body for the promotion of health and social gain. The autism specific education will be provided using evidence based education interventions. “

This requires that methodologies:

- Are supported by peer-reviewed research
- Demonstrate reliability and validity
- Can be independently verified and replicated
- Are recognised as safe and effective within national and international professional standards

This standard exists to ensure that all pupils receive supports that are demonstrably beneficial, ethically sound, and aligned with best practice in education and care.



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Risk Considerations

Methods that do not meet these criteria present significant concerns. In particular, unorthodox or non-evidence-based communication approaches may be highly vulnerable to error, including unintended facilitator influence, misinterpretation, or the attribution of communication that cannot be independently verified.

In practice, this creates a risk that decisions may be made based on information that is unreliable or not authentically generated by the pupil. For pupils with complex needs, this risk is especially serious and may have implications for their welfare, education, and safeguarding.

For these reasons, such approaches cannot be supported within Autism Ireland schools.

Governance and School Authority

All staff and visiting professionals operating within Autism Ireland schools are under the direction and management of the school principal.

The principal is responsible for ensuring that:

- All individuals working within the school are appropriately qualified, vetted, and authorised
- All interventions align with the school's ethos and established educational and therapeutic plans

Interventions delivered within the school must form part of:

- The school plan
- The class plan
- The individual pupil plan

External Tutors and Parental Requests

While schools work collaboratively with parents and external professionals where appropriate, access to the classroom environment during school hours is not an automatic entitlement and cannot be facilitated on the basis of parental request alone.



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In particular, private tutors or therapists who are not part of the school's staff or approved multidisciplinary supports will not be permitted to deliver interventions within the classroom setting.

This position is necessary to:

- Maintain consistency of approach
- Protect the learning environment of all pupils
- Ensure safeguarding, accountability, and professional oversight

Communication Supports

Schools remain committed to supporting each pupil to develop meaningful communication and life skills that enhance independence and quality of life.

A range of evidence-based communication approaches, including AAC, are used based on individual need. Where a pupil is independently and fluently using an established communication system not currently in use within the school (e.g. Lámh), the school will make reasonable efforts to access appropriate training through the NCSE or relevant services.

Conclusion

In summary, Autism Ireland schools are committed to delivering safe, effective, and evidence-based education and care. Approaches that lack sufficient scientific rigour or are open to significant error cannot be supported within the school environment, particularly where they may pose a risk to the pupil's welfare or the integrity of their communication. Equally, the school retains responsibility for determining who may access the classroom and deliver interventions during school hours. These positions are essential to ensuring high standards of practice, safeguarding of all pupils, and the provision of a consistent and coherent learning environment.