

## **St. Michael's National School**

### **'Circle of friends'/'Buddy' Policy**

#### **Introduction**

Teaching social interaction skills to children with autism spectrum disorder is perhaps the most critical, and often most difficult, aspect of intervention programming. In the context of social interaction, motivation can be described as a child's desire to want to interact or play with another child. We at St. Michael's Primary School have found that using typically developing children as 'peer trainers' is a highly effective method of teaching. This initiative promotes a culture of acceptance, empathy and inclusion in St. Michael's. It empowers our "Buddies" to grow in confidence and develop their leadership skills while providing developmentally appropriate examples of play and social behaviour.

#### **Rationale**

This policy has been formulated and implemented:

- To maximise learning for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- To ensure that every child with autism is given every opportunity to interact and socialize with typically developing children.
- To ensure that children with autism are given the opportunity to learn appropriate behaviours from typically developing children.

#### **Aims**

- To promote a happy, caring, attractive environment that will stimulate learning for the children with autism.
- To provide a broad and balanced curriculum that will cater for the needs of pupils in our Centre for Autism.
- To develop the children's self-confidence and self-discipline.
- To encourage the children in the mainstream classes to value one another and respect children with differing needs and abilities.
- To prepare the children for the opportunities and experiences of adult life.

### **Letter of consent**

Some of the children enrolled in our Centre for Autism have challenging behaviours. Written consent will be obtained from parents/guardians of the 'Buddies'/'Circle of Friends' prior to their child engaging in this initiative. \*See attached permission form.\*

### **Factors to consider**

There are several important factors to consider when choosing a 'Circle of Friends' or 'Buddy'. They include:

- Age.
- Availability and Consistency.
- Maturity.
- Dependency.

### **Ratification of Policy**

This policy will be reviewed and updated as and when deemed necessary by the Board of Management of St. Michael's Primary School and Centre for Autism.

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management on \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Chairperson of Board of Management.**

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Principal.**

### **Training of the 'Circle of Friends'**

All "Buddies" will receive training before working with the children in our Centre for Autism. Strategies to be taught are:

- Orienting attention.
- Praise for appropriate behaviour.
- Encouraging conversation.
- Encouraging appropriate play skills in and out of the classroom.

Once the training is complete the 'Circle of friends' will be encouraged to utilise their new skills with the children with autism. This will be supervised by either the class teacher or Special Needs Assistants. At no time will the 'Circle of Friends'/'Buddies' be left alone with the children.

"Circle of Friends/Buddies" will be involved in such activities as:-

- Board games, jigsaws, card games, ball games, drawing, colouring etc.
- O.T. activities and exercises.
- I.T.
- Interacting with children with autism in playground - swings, slides, trampoline, climbing frame etc.
- Paired reading and writing activities.
- Walking into and out of school.
- Role play.
- Creation of social stories.
- Support the children with autism during integration periods in mainstream classes.

All of the above will be under the supervision of the class teacher

### **Safety of the children**

The safety of all the children involved with the 'Circle of Friends'/'Buddy system', is paramount and will be taken into consideration with all the activities and games.

Dear Parents/ Guardians,

Your child has requested to work with the children with autism at St. Michael's Primary School and Centre for Autism. At no time will your child be unsupervised in the classroom or the playground area. Your child will undergo specific training techniques to enable them to work with the children effectively. All of the children will be well supervised by either the class teacher or the Special Needs Assistants.

Please sign and date the form below and return this slip to your child's class teacher.

Yours sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_

Mr. F. Fitzpatrick.  
(Principal)

-----

I, give  / do not give  my child, ..... , permission to work with the children in the autism classes at St. Michael's Primary School.

.....  
Parent/Guardian's Signature

.....  
Date