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School Tours, Excursions and Sports Activities Policy

This policy is tailored to an MGLD special school catering for pupils with mild general learning disabilities (MGLD). It covers educational school tours, local excursions, swimming, sports days, inter-school sporting events, outdoor education and other activities taking place away from the school or outside the usual school routine.

The policy prioritises pupil safety, inclusion, dignity, accessibility and participation, while recognising that pupils may require individualised supervision, personal care, communication support, medical assistance, mobility equipment or other reasonable accommodations.

1. Policy statement

St. Ultan's Special School recognises the educational, social, physical and emotional benefits of school tours, excursions and sports activities. These experiences provide valuable opportunities for pupils to develop independence, communication, social skills, confidence, physical fitness and an understanding of the wider community.

The school is committed to providing meaningful and inclusive opportunities for all pupils to participate in activities appropriate to their age, abilities, interests and individual needs.

All school tours, excursions and sports activities will be planned and conducted with due regard to pupil welfare, child safeguarding, health and safety, accessibility, medical requirements and appropriate supervision.

No pupil will be excluded solely because of their disability. Where additional support or reasonable accommodations are required, the school will consider how these can be provided safely and practicably.

The policy will be implemented in accordance with relevant Irish legislation, Department of Education guidance, school procedures and the school's Child Safeguarding Statement.

2. Aims and objectives

This policy aims to:

- Provide safe, educational, enjoyable and inclusive experiences for pupils.
- Support learning outside the classroom and the development of life skills.
- Promote physical activity, teamwork, cooperation and positive social interaction.
- Ensure that tours and activities are accessible and appropriate to pupils' individual needs.
- Establish clear procedures for planning, approval, risk assessment and supervision.
- Ensure that parents and guardians receive appropriate information and are consulted where necessary (this does not include informal community walks that take place regularly as part of our SPHE and Stay Safe Curriculum, including trips to cafes for breakfast or lunch or ordering hot or cold drinks).
- Identify and manage medical, behavioural, communication, mobility, personal care and other support needs.
- Clarify the responsibilities of the Board of Management, Principal, teachers, SNAs, parents and activity providers.
- Ensure appropriate procedures are in place for emergencies, accidents, missing pupils and unexpected changes to activities.

3. Scope of the policy

This policy applies to all school-organised activities, including:

- Full-day trips, full-day educational tours and full-day curriculum-related excursions.
- Visits to museums, farms, theatres, Cinema, and heritage sites.
- Walks, local outings and visits to local amenities.
- Sports days, athletics, games and inter-school competitions.
- Swimming, gymnastics and other specialist sporting activities.
- Outdoor education, nature walks and adventure activities.
- Visits to parks, playgrounds, leisure centres and other recreational facilities.

The policy applies to pupils, school staff, approved volunteers and any external providers involved in the activity.

Activities organised independently by parents or external organisations outside the school's responsibility are not automatically covered by this policy, although the school may communicate relevant safeguarding or support information where appropriate.

4. Planning and approval of school tours and excursions

All tours and excursions must be planned and approved in accordance with the school's procedures and the authority delegated by the Board of Management.

The proposed activity should have a clear educational, developmental, social or physical benefit for pupils and be appropriate to their individual needs.

Before approval, the organising teacher should submit the relevant details to the Principal, including:

- Purpose and learning objectives of the activity.
- Proposed destination, date, duration and itinerary.
- Number of pupils participating and staffing arrangements.
- Transport arrangements and accessibility requirements.
- Individual pupil support and medical requirements.
- Risk assessment and emergency arrangements.
- Estimated cost and arrangements for payment.
- Any specific requirements of the venue or activity provider.

The Principal will review the proposal and ensure that the necessary arrangements are in place before the activity proceeds. Activities requiring additional approval under school procedures must receive that approval in advance.

5. Risk assessment and safety planning

A written risk assessment must be completed before each tour, excursion or sports activity. The level of detail should reflect the nature, duration and risks of the activity and the individual needs of the pupils participating.

The risk assessment should consider, as relevant:

- Traffic, roads, car parks and safe movement between locations.
- Environmental hazards, including water, uneven ground, weather and public spaces.
- Pupil supervision, separation from the group and absconding or wandering risks.
- Medical conditions, allergies, medication and emergency care.
- Communication difficulties and the ability of pupils to understand safety instructions.
- Mobility, transfers, wheelchair access and accessible toilet facilities.
- Personal care, changing facilities, dignity and privacy.
- Sensory sensitivities, anxiety, distress and changes to routine.
- Eating, drinking, choking and hydration requirements.
- Safeguarding arrangements and interaction with members of the public.
- Transport, emergency evacuation and arrangements for delays or cancellations.

Control measures must be identified and communicated to relevant staff. The assessment should be reviewed if circumstances change or new risks arise.

The activity must be postponed, modified or cancelled if significant risks cannot be managed adequately.

The school's Child Safeguarding Statement and risk assessment must also address relevant safeguarding risks associated with off-site activities. The Department's current school safeguarding procedures should be followed.

6. Supervision and staffing

Appropriate supervision is essential for all activities. The required staffing arrangements must be determined by the Principal following consideration of the risk assessment, pupils' individual support needs and the nature of the activity.

There is no single staffing ratio that is appropriate for every MGLD school activity. Ratios must be sufficient to provide safe, effective supervision and must take account of pupils who require close or individual supervision.

When planning staffing, the school will consider:

- Pupils' age, abilities and level of independence.
- Mobility, communication and personal care needs.
- Medical conditions and emergency support requirements.
- Behavioural support needs and risks of wandering or becoming separated.
- The type of venue and activity.
- The number of pupils participating and the availability of suitable staff.
- The need for staff to accompany pupils to toilets or provide individual support without leaving the rest of the group inadequately supervised.

The organising teacher will ensure that all accompanying staff understand their roles, the itinerary, the risk assessment, emergency procedures and the individual needs of pupils in their care.

7. Parental consent and communication

Written parental or guardian consent must be obtained for each pupil participating in a school tour, sporting event or excursion, in accordance with school procedures. Written consent is not needed for Community Walks and casual visits to local cafes.

Parents and guardians will receive information about:

- The purpose, destination and date of the activity.
- Departure and return times.
- Transport arrangements.
- Clothing, footwear, packed lunches and other items required.
- Costs and payment arrangements.
- Any activity-specific risks or requirements.
- Relevant contact and emergency arrangements.

This does not apply to Community Walks and casual visits to local cafes.

Parents and guardians must inform the school of changes to medical, dietary, mobility, communication or other support needs that may affect participation.

Consent for photographs, videos or other uses of a pupil's image must be managed separately in accordance with school policies and applicable data protection requirements where required.

The school will make reasonable efforts to ensure that costs do not unnecessarily prevent pupils from participating. Financial difficulties should be discussed confidentially with the Principal.

8. Individual pupil needs and reasonable accommodations

The school recognises that pupils may require additional support to participate meaningfully and safely.

Before an activity, relevant staff will review individual support plans and consider any adjustments required, including:

- Accessible transport, routes, entrances and facilities.
- Wheelchairs, mobility aids, adapted equipment and safe transfer arrangements.
- Visual timetables, social stories, symbols, communication devices or other communication supports.
- Familiar staff, additional transition time or quiet spaces.
- Individual supervision and positive behavioural support.
- Access to medication, emergency equipment and personal care supplies.
- Suitable food, drinks, rest breaks and sensory accommodations.

Where a concern arises about a pupil's participation, the school will consult with parents or guardians and consider reasonable alternatives or additional supports.

A pupil should not be excluded automatically because they have a disability, a medical condition, communication difficulties or require additional assistance. Decisions must be based on the pupil's individual circumstances, the activity's risks and the measures available to support safe participation.

9. Transport arrangements

All transport must be appropriate for the pupils and the planned activity.

The school will ensure that:

- Transport is arranged through an appropriate, approved provider or suitable school transport arrangements.
- Vehicles and routes are suitable for pupils' mobility and accessibility needs.
- Wheelchair users are transported using suitable wheelchair-accessible vehicles and approved securement systems where required.
- Pupils are supervised while boarding, travelling and disembarking.
- Staff conduct headcounts before departure, at appropriate points during the journey and on arrival.
- Pupils are not left unattended in vehicles.

- Emergency contact details and relevant medical information are available to the appropriate staff.
- Arrival and collection arrangements are clearly communicated.

Staff must follow the school's transport and safety procedures and any applicable legal requirements. Any incident or concern during transport must be reported in accordance with school procedures.

10. Medical needs, medication and emergencies

Before departure, the organising teacher must ensure that relevant medical information is available to the staff responsible for each pupil.

This includes, where applicable:

- Prescribed medication and the school's medication procedures.
- Individual emergency action plans.
- Information on allergies and anaphylaxis.
- Seizure management plans.
- Diabetes or other medical management requirements.
- Eating, drinking and swallowing plans.
- Relevant communication methods and signs of distress.
- Emergency contact details.

Medication must be managed by appropriately authorised or trained staff in accordance with the school's Administration of Medication Policy and individual pupil arrangements.

Staff must know how to contact emergency services and the Principal or designated school contact. A first-aid kit and any required emergency equipment must be available and accessible.

In an emergency, staff must prioritise immediate pupil safety, obtain medical assistance where necessary and inform the school and parents or guardians as soon as practicable. Incidents must be documented and reviewed in line with school procedures.

11. Child safeguarding and pupil welfare

All school tours, excursions and sports activities must be conducted in accordance with the school's Child Safeguarding Statement and the applicable Department of Education Child Protection Procedures for Schools.

The school will ensure that:

- All staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities.
- Appropriate supervision is maintained in public and unfamiliar environments.
- Staff conduct themselves in accordance with professional boundaries and school policies.

- Toileting, changing and personal care are managed respectfully and in accordance with agreed procedures.
- Pupils are protected from inappropriate contact or interaction with members of the public.
- Any safeguarding concern, disclosure or incident is managed and reported through the school's established procedures.
- Relevant arrangements are made for photographs, electronic devices and the sharing of pupil information.

12. Sports activities and physical education events

The school encourages participation in age-appropriate physical activity and sporting opportunities that promote health, enjoyment, confidence, cooperation and inclusion.

Sports activities may include sports days, athletics, games, swimming, adapted sports, inter-school events and other physical activities suitable for pupils.

Before a sports activity, staff must ensure that:

- The activity is appropriate to the pupils' abilities and individual needs.
- A suitable risk assessment has been completed.
- Equipment and facilities are appropriate and checked before use.
- Pupils have suitable clothing, footwear and any necessary protective equipment.
- Staff understand the activity, supervision requirements and emergency procedures.
- Individual medical and physical support needs have been considered.
- Adequate water, rest breaks, shade and weather-related precautions are provided.
- Any external coach or provider has been appropriately assessed and briefed on relevant school requirements.

Pupils will be encouraged to participate at a level appropriate to their abilities. Adaptations may include modified rules, shorter activities, alternative equipment, additional rest breaks or non-competitive options.

No pupil should be pressured to take part in an activity that is unsuitable for their individual needs or causes significant distress. Where a pupil cannot safely participate in a particular activity, staff should consider an appropriate alternative that preserves their inclusion and dignity.

12.1 Swimming and water-based activities

Swimming and water-based activities require specific planning because of the risks associated with water and the individual needs of pupils.

Before a swimming activity, the school must consider:

- The suitability and safety arrangements of the pool or venue.
- Qualified instruction and the venue's supervision arrangements.
- Appropriate pupil-to-staff supervision based on the individual risk assessment.

- Changing facilities, personal care and dignity.
- Pupils' swimming ability, communication needs, medical conditions and individual support plans.
- Accessible facilities and any required mobility or transfer assistance.
- Emergency procedures, including rescue arrangements.
- Any restrictions or additional precautions required for an individual pupil.

The school's risk assessment and staffing arrangements must complement, not replace, the venue's own safety procedures. Staff must follow the agreed activity plan and must not assume that a lifeguard or external instructor provides all the supervision required for the school's pupils.

13. Food, hydration, clothing and personal belongings

Parents and guardians will be informed of any requirements relating to lunch, snacks, drinks, suitable clothing, footwear, sunscreen, rainwear and other necessary items.

The school will take account of pupils' dietary needs, allergies, swallowing difficulties, medication and hydration plans.

Staff should ensure that pupils have access to appropriate food and drinks throughout the activity and that any necessary personal care supplies, spare clothing or mobility equipment are available.

Valuable items should be discouraged unless required for the activity. The school will communicate any arrangements for money, mobile phones or other personal belongings in advance.

14. Behaviour, distress and changes to plans

Staff will use positive, respectful and proactive approaches to supporting pupils during activities. Expectations should be explained in ways that pupils can understand, using appropriate communication supports.

Where a pupil becomes distressed, overwhelmed, unwell or unable to continue, staff will follow the pupil's individual support plan and take reasonable steps to support their wellbeing.

The organising teacher may modify an activity or return to school early if necessary to protect pupil safety or wellbeing. Parents or guardians should be contacted where appropriate.

Any restrictive intervention must be managed in accordance with the school's approved procedures, relevant guidance and the pupil's support plan. It must never be used as a routine means of securing compliance with an activity.

15. Financial arrangements and inclusion

The school will communicate anticipated costs to parents and guardians in advance.

Every reasonable effort will be made to plan affordable activities and avoid unnecessary financial barriers to participation. Where funding or alternative arrangements may be available, the school may consider these in accordance with its resources and procedures.

Pupils who do not participate in an excursion must be provided with appropriate arrangements for their education and supervision in accordance with school procedures.

16. Unforeseen circumstances and cancellation

An activity may be postponed, changed or cancelled due to severe weather, transport problems, venue closures, staff availability, health concerns or other unforeseen circumstances.

The Principal, in consultation with the organising teacher as appropriate, will decide whether an activity can proceed safely.

Parents and guardians will be informed of significant changes, cancellations or delays as soon as practicable. Staff must ensure that safe arrangements are in place for pupils while alternative plans or transport are organised.

17. Evaluation, reporting and review

Following a tour, excursion or significant sports activity, the organising teacher should review its success and record any relevant issues, incidents or recommendations for future activities.

Accidents, injuries, safeguarding concerns, near misses and other significant incidents must be documented and reported in accordance with school procedures.

This policy will be communicated to staff and parents and guardians and will be reviewed every two years, or earlier if required by changes in legislation, Department of Education guidance, school practice or pupil needs.

18. Roles and responsibilities

Person or group	Responsibilities
Board of Management	Approves the policy and oversees its implementation.
Principal	Ensures activities are appropriately approved, risk-assessed and adequately resourced.
Organising teacher	Plans the activity, coordinates consent, prepares the risk assessment and briefs staff.
Accompanying teachers and SNAs	Follow the agreed plan, supervise pupils and support individual needs.
Parents and guardians	Provide consent, updated information and any required pupil-specific supplies.
External providers	Provide relevant safety information, suitably qualified personnel and appropriate facilities for their activity.

19. Relevant legislation and guidance

This policy should be read alongside the school's other relevant policies and procedures and current Irish guidance, including:

- Department of Education and Youth — Child Protection Procedures for Schools. The Department's 2025 procedures include guidance on school trips and off-site safeguarding risks.
- Department of Education and Youth — Health and Safety Guidelines for Schools.
- Department of Children, Disability and Equality — Children First Guidance.
- Children First Act 2015.
- Department of Education Circular M20/04 — Educational Tours by School Groups, noting that its scope is post-primary educational tours and that the school should check its applicability alongside current requirements.

St. Ultan's Special School

Policy approved by Board of Management: 9th - November - '26

Date for review: December '28

Chairperson, Board of Management: [signature]

Principal: J. Cunningham