

Burren Sonas Kindergarten

Information for Parents

2021/22

## **The Burren Sonas Kindergarten Programme:**

The Burren Sonas Kindergarten serves children 2 1/2 -5 1/2 years old, offering up to five days of attendance, 9:30am-1:00pm. Enrollment is encouraged for all 5 days of the programme to support children to develop a regular rhythm of activity and play with their friends and teachers. The mixed age, play oriented programme offers a gentle bridge between the familiar world of home and the upcoming world of school.

## **The History of Burren Sonas Kindergarten:**

The Kindergarten began as a parent initiative about 15 years ago. Parents of the time organised funding, the renting of the Village Hall, administration, and a search for a Steiner trained teacher. The parents came together to build most of the furniture. They planned numerous activities and craft projects with local people to inform people about Steiner education and welcomed children from diverse backgrounds. We have been located for 6 years at the current space which is the fourth home for the kindergarten.

## **Overview of the Kindergarten Session:**

In a Steiner kindergarten the children grow in a safe and caring environment surrounded by simple toys and natural materials. These objects leave room for the child's active imagination and build a foundation for creative intentions in adulthood. Children are adept imitators by nature; in fact, they cannot help but imitate, in an imaginative way, the actions of those around them. Therefore we teach through modelling (as opposed to formal instruction), and we strive to be worthy of imitation in all we do. We emphasise caring and respect for each other, and for Mother Earth through our activities.

We begin our day outside by walking to the garden, Holy Well, or the Cathedral grounds which is a lovely refreshing time for all. It provides an opportunity for children to stretch and move after the drive to kindergarten. Meeting in a natural environment of the outdoors is a neutral and peaceful place to begin the day with each other. Children are to enter kindergarten dressed in their waterproof clothing when they arrive. We encourage parents to allow children to dress themselves independently as much as possible, giving assistance only when necessary. Outside we enjoy the chances to run, climb, splash in puddles, and stretch our limbs. We play in the garden, possibly in the sand, or planting and watching things grow, exploring and appreciating the world around us. When we walk it encourages rhythm, movement, and breathing, as well as offering a feast for the senses, witnessing the change of seasons. Walking with others is a time to share a wonderful social experience, as well as developing awareness. Sometimes we do a circle time outside to learn seasonal songs, poems, and movement of fingers and bodies.

We return to kindergarten to change clothes, replacing any that are wet and dirty, and to wash hands. Children are then free to play with any and all of the toys together, devising a myriad of games, structures, and imaginative play. During this time children can choose to play alone, in groups, or do craft or other activities with teachers. While playing freely children recreate, learn from, and act out what they have seen and experienced during their lives.

Children are invited to participate in all small group activities, such as: craft making, watercolour painting, baking, drawing and colouring their own pictures, and preparing for mealtimes. Some children thrive in smaller group situations where they can more easily communicate with friends and teachers while learning new skills. While teachers encourage children to enjoy participating in activities, they recognise that children can choose to play or do a different task. The Steiner method provides a structure and rhythm to support safety and security for children, while allowing for imagination and free will to flourish.

After free play children and teachers share a small meal together. Children help to prepare by grating cheese, cutting fruit, or setting the table as they wish. Children take turns to do jobs like serving the bowls of food, or putting out the candle we light while we eat. Before eating we say a blessing of thanksgiving together. Meal times are very important for children to learn to share conversation together by taking turns speaking and listening to each other respectfully. Our meals are prepared with as many organically grown foods as possible, with the same menu for each day of the week. In this way many children learn the days of the week by knowing that bread day is always Tuesday, or pasta day is always Friday. By sharing food with their friends, children learn to try new foods, and become more willing to eat the same meals as friends. Children then sing a thank you for the food, wash hands, and return to play.

Children finish free play by tidying up together with the teachers, often while singing the tidy up song. Each toy has its place and is respectfully put away with care. We gather together in a circle at the end of the day to tell a story, read books children choose, play games, or to watch a puppet show. This provides an opportunity for everyone to gather together as a group to relax and breathe together before saying farewell.

Through the experience of kindergarten children are supported by the recurring rhythm of the day, the week and the yearly rhythm, as is recognised through the seasons. The structure and rhythm provide a secure foundation for future development; while allowing

for fun, creativity and spontaneity to arise.

### **Morning Arrival:**

Our day begins at 9:30 AM. The morning generally runs more smoothly for a child who is able to arrive on time and enter play with the entire class. As the beginning of the day is important to the child and to the class, encouraging a sense of security, please try to help your child arrive for this beginning on time. If parents are entering kindergarten together we ask that they converse quietly together to maintain a warm and peaceful atmosphere in the room. We hope you understand that we ask this in order to devote our attention to the children during the kindergarten time.

### **Clothing:**

Warmth is very important for young children, as is experiencing the natural world and the seasons. We intend to go outside everyday unless it is Tuesday, baking day, or the weather is severe; therefore it is of paramount importance that your child comes prepared with layers of natural clothing that can be adjusted depending on weather.

We ask that children keep the following items at kindergarten:

1. A pair of indoor slippers that are flexible and supportive which a child can put on her/himself and that stay on. Children will change into these on entering the classroom.
2. A pair of waterproof dungarees or trousers, and a raincoat to protect your child's clothing when outside. These are now available in shops or at Puddleducks online.
3. A pair of waterproof boots that a child can put on by her/himself.
4. A warm hat, mittens, and/ or scarf for cold weather. In warm seasons a sunhat for protection against sunburn.
5. A complete change of clothes including a few extra pairs of socks.
6. Extra layers to go under raingear when it is cold, such as: wool jumpers, leggings, and warm coat.
7. Suncream with your child's name.

Please clearly label your child's shoes, boots, and clothes; and check daily that there is an adequate supply at kindergarten, especially during cold and wet weather. We will send wet and dirty clothes home in your children's bags.

### **Meals/Snacks:**

Children only need to bring a piece of fruit each day to share, as a small meal will be provided. Each morning we will prepare a healthy meal of grains, or soup made from organically grown ingredients. We will cooperate with parents in determining alternatives for children who have sensitivities or allergies to foods. We encourage all children to partake of group meals encouraging the social experience of eating together.

### **Personal belongings:**

We ask that your children do not bring personal toys, dolls, purses, wallets, money, jewellery, watches, games, etc., to kindergarten. This is especially important now at the time of Covid 19. We cannot be responsible for cleaning any materials that are coming from home as they may prevent a health risk to everyone. We ask for your understanding on this matter. This year we are required to send any of these personal belongings home so please make it clear to children we must enforce this rule to prevent any upsets when they arrive at kindergarten.

### **Birthdays:**

On, or near, your child's birthday we will celebrate together at kindergarten. The teachers will organise the day and time to allow for parents and siblings to attend the celebration. The teacher will tell the special birthday story. A handmade birthday gift, decorated beeswax candles, and birthday book will be presented to the child by her/his friends. We ask that the family make a handmade cake, or treat, to share with all the children. Please plan to make something low in sugar, without artificial colours and flavours. This kindergarten celebration is to give the opportunity to celebrate your child's birthday together with all her/his kindergarten friends, and relieve stress for parents to create a large party at home.

As part of sharing the birthday story we ask parents to think of a brief memory to speak as a teacher lights a candle to mark each year of your child's life. This provides a lovely time to reflect on your child's presence in your life, and gives the children a personal memory of their friends.

If you celebrate the birthday of your child by having a party outside of kindergarten in addition to the kg celebration, please be sensitive about how you invite children in the kg.

If you are not able to invite everyone, please invite children with invitations outside of kg, and ask the child not to discuss the event at kg time to avoid hurt feelings.

## **Festivals and Parent Gatherings:**

Family festivals are an important foundation of forming a community around the kindergarten. These seasonal celebrations are valuable for children to have the involvement of family with the activities of kindergarten. They support the children and the parents in working and having fun together, encouraging a sense of belonging. We ask all the parents to please assist in preparing for these events, as well as attending them with your children. We enjoy the presence of our present and past kindergarten community in celebrating the seasonal festivals.

We welcome the participation of family, including siblings and grandparents in our main festivals. These are:

1. St. Martin's Day, also called the Lantern Festival, a fine evening on or near the 11<sup>th</sup> of November. Families meet at a parent's house where there are few outside lights and go for an evening walk with lit lanterns. Families prepare simple treats to share with each other. Children and adults share the treats by breaking them in half and giving the other half to someone else, to represent St. Martin sharing his cloak with a poor man. Teachers make hot apple punch to share with everyone.
2. Advent Spiral which is celebrated the first Friday in Advent, usually at the ancient and beautiful Kilfenora Cathedral. Teachers and parents create the green living spiral of fragrant branches harvested by everyone. Families gather inside the Cathedral where children and parents walk the spiral lighting their candles in apples and placing them around. This festival symbolises the light of love and courage shining out in the darkness.
3. Beltaine which is celebrated during kindergarten time on or near to 1<sup>st</sup> of May to mark the beginning of summer. On this day we gather at the Holy Well where we decorate head wreaths and dance the Maypole.
4. The last day of the year when we celebrate the past year and have a special ceremony to wish everyone goodbye for the year, especially those children who will go on to primary school.

Sadly in the past 18 months we have been unable to celebrate our festivals as community events due to Covid 19 restrictions. We have been able to celebrate with the children in

kindergarten so they have been able to experience the meaning of the festivals. We hope that we will be able to return to community celebrations this year.

### **Home Visits:**

If you feel your child would benefit from a home visit from a teacher please let us know. Sometimes a child will settle in kindergarten better if she/he sees her/his teacher in the home environment. This allows for a relaxed time when children can see how much interest a teacher has in their lives. Children are free to show their homes, families, pets, and favourite toys to their teacher in a known environment.

Likewise if your child is experiencing difficulties in kindergarten sometimes a home visit can provide some extra support.

### **Parent-Teacher Meetings:**

Meetings between parents and teachers are often scheduled in late spring, but may be scheduled at the request of a teacher or parent at any time of the year as needed. Teachers are available for any concerns that parents might have, and are always grateful to hear immediately of any changes in the child's life. You may feel free to make an appointment with the teachers whenever you feel one is needed. Teachers are available to ring parents on the phone after the sessions when requested. Due to the Corona virus teachers are aware that there may not be as frequent informal contact with parents due to restrictions. We are here to support you and your families so please do ask for phone calls or meetings to communicate about your child.

### **Parent Involvement:**

Our kindergarten is a community based, non-profit organisation which is over 15 years old. It has developed and thrived this long only by the involvement of families through the years. We are managed by a community Board of Management which voluntarily supports the kindergarten by doing administration and longterm planning. The quality of education we seek to provide for your children could not exist without the partnership of parents. Your help, according to your individual interests and talents, is highly valued. We ask that all parents consider joining the Board of Management, especially as some of our present Board members need to move on to other volunteer work.

In addition we do ask parents to volunteer go for a walk or two per week with the children.

This provides an opportunity for you to meet your child's new friends and to see your child interacting with others. For parents involved in walks, we are now required to apply for Garda vetting, and to receive two written references, one preferably from a current employer.

There is the weekly towel washing which parents are requested to do on a rota system. Also there are various end of term cleaning and repairing tasks. The kindergarten really depends on everyone's involvement. The teachers and the children appreciate all the effort that parents give to keep the kindergarten flourishing.

### **A Note About Sleep:**

Adequate sleep is extremely important to a child's happy experience in any social setting. It is relevant how a child enters sleep. The mood that surrounds the child when falling asleep is carried into the dream life. Teachers can offer suggestions for healthy sleep. It is also helpful to let the teachers know in the morning if your child has had a difficult night or morning so we can offer some extra support.

### **Children, Television, and Computer Use:**

In the kindergarten, perhaps more than anywhere else, we have the opportunity to observe the effects of television watching on the young child. Frequently it is quite clear who has been watching TV, as the child will re-enact television scenes during playtime, instead of being in touch with her/his innate powers of imaginative fantasy. Unfortunately television programmes intrude on the child's emerging sense of self and their place in the world. For this and other health reasons, we recommend that young children watch little, if any, television. For suggestions about withdrawing from television, you can ask the teachers.

Rather more worrying is the trend of children using electronic devices at earlier and earlier ages. There are many studies documenting the addictive nature of these devices and the longterm physical, emotional, and mental health issues for children. We ask parents to please give your young children as long a period as possible free from relationships to electronic devices. In the past 5 years the teachers have observed that children using these devices have additional difficulties socialising with other children, and lack of focus. We assure you that your children will have no difficulty learning these new technologies later on when they are needed.

## Learning More About the Steiner-Waldorf Kindergarten:

There is a wide body of literature available on child development and Steiner Waldorf Education. We are fortunate to have a growing library in the kindergarten for parent's use. Two good books for a starting point are *Beyond the Rainbow Bridge* by Barbara Patterson and *Work and Play in Early Childhood* by Freya Jaffke. If you are interested in learning more, the teachers are happy to make recommendations. Please use the sign up book for taking books out for a month. Please remember to bring books back to the library.

## Fees:

Payment of fees is due in advance and are to be paid monthly in 9 payments to our bank account. At the beginning of the year you will be issued your annual fees bill. At the end of Autumn, Easter and June terms your balance will be reconciled and you will be notified of fees that may be owing. Please let us know if you are having difficulty paying fees so arrangements can be made. We expect parents to pay for times when children are absent from kindergarten as it is too costly to individually redo fees. It will only be possible to receive a fee reduction if your child is absent for 4 weeks or more. This is the same policy that most other childcare facilities use.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs requires 4 weeks notice if you are making any changes in your child's participation in either the ECCE or NCS programmes. If you need to change your child to a different creche you must give us notice in writing 4 weeks in advance so we have time to end your entitlement to our service before the other service can enroll your child.

## Policies:

There are many other policies and procedures on our website that you are welcome to peruse at your leisure. Please let the teachers know if you have any questions or need more information on any of them. We are required by Tusla to have policies and procedures in place on a wide variety of areas. We have all these in place:

Child protection, Complaints policy, Policy on administration of medicine, Policy on infection control, Policy on managing behaviour, Policy on safe sleep, Fire safety policy, Inclusion policy, Outings policy, Policy on accidents and incidents, Policy on authorisation to collect children, Policy on healthy eating, Policy on outdoor play, Policy on staff absences, Policy on the use of internet and photographic and recording devices, Recruitment policy, Risk management policy, Settling in policy, Staff training policy, and

Supervision policy. The Covid policies have been emailed to you directly. These policies have all been updated on August 2020. These policies have been created in accordance to requirements of Tusla and the DCYA and are there to provide a common framework for all of us.

However the best way to deal with any matters is to discuss them with the teachers personally. We will try our utmost to work in conjunction with families to support your children. Your children's welfare is at the heart of our work. With all the changes due to the pandemic we may need not have as many informal ways to share information as we did in the past. We can be contacted by phone outside of session hours to speak together or make an appointment to speak face-to-face.

### **Parking:**

Parking is available along the street and at the square in Kilfenora. Please do not ever park in the yard/block access to the yard to the left of kindergarten as this belongs to our landlords and needs to be kept free. Also please be aware when parking near the front door of kindergarten to allow enough space for tractors to pass on the road.

### **Kindergarten and the Changes due to Covid 19:**

We are committed to doing the best we can to prevent the spread of Covid 19 in kindergarten and have been working hard to implement all of the public health guidelines. How you as parents can help is to keep your child home when she/he is ill. This means that if a child has any ONE symptom on the list she/he must stay home. Check with your GP if you have any doubts about symptoms your children is having. Please wash your children's hands before coming to kindergarten, and we will wash them when they enter the building. If it is necessary to enter the building, there are hand sanitisers on the walls as you enter the building, and when you enter the classroom. Please do use them every time if you enter and leave the building. We ask you to be aware of social distancing inside the building, and outside as you are waiting to drop or collect your child.

We will also be emailing you a form the week before your child starts kindergarten which you need to sign and return before your child comes the 1<sup>st</sup> day. This form is required by the HSE and states that your child is well. Please drop this form in our silver post box located on the inside of the half wall in the yard to the left of kindergarten.

After last year's experience we have decided to continue the procedure in the mornings for

drop off and collection of your child. We are asking you to arrive at the door of kindergarten with your child already dressed in raingear for outside play (EXCEPT TUESDAYS WHEN WE DO NOT GO OUT), then wait outside at the door for a teacher to meet you and bring your child into the kindergarten building. We will be available to greet your child at the door from 9:20-9:30am. We will also ask you every morning we receive your child whether she/he is well and has received medicine while at home, which is required by Tusla. We will ask you not to come into the building unless you are coming for the walk with us that day, or unless your child is distressed for any reason and needs extra support. If you will be later than 9:30 we will ask you to meet us outside where we are walking.

For collection time the teachers will dress children and gather their outside gear to bring to the door to meet you there at 1pm. We appreciate your patience with this process as it does take longer to collect each child's raingear, wellies, and crafts, etc.

We will be extra vigilant about cleaning in kindergarten to help reduce the spread of germs. Extra handwashing will be in place for children and teachers at sinks in the kindergarten. As hand sanitiser is alcohol based we prefer to use it only when necessary and wash hands instead. We do use a good quality brand of liquid soap from our local wholefoods shop which is gentle on hands that are frequently washed. We will be using hand sanitiser on children's hands after outdoor play before holding hands again. There will be additional laundry each week for parents so we may need to decide to assign two families per week for laundry duties if it is necessary. This year we will be supplying laundry liquid for washing.

The HSE is recommending that children attend kindergarten with freshly washed clothing everyday. We realise this may not be possible for everyone but please prioritise clean shirts as the sleeves are most likely to be used for nose wiping.

We are asking parents to supply two extra contact people for emergency contact as we need to ensure that someone can immediately collect a child who falls ill.

When parents come for the walk we ask that you are aware of social distancing with each other, and the teachers. If you are more comfortable wearing a face covering that is acceptable. The teachers will not be wearing face coverings as we are exempt in order to create a friendly environment for the children. When you enter kindergarten we ask that you wash hands properly at one of the hand basins located in the bathroom, and

classroom, and dry them with a paper towel, discarding it in the pedal bins located under the sinks. Our walks may be extended an extra 20 minutes each day-- from 9:35 to 10:55am. This is due to the health benefits for the children as outdoor play allows for less close contact in the fresh air. On return from the walk parents will be able to leave the children with the teachers at the door of kindergarten without the necessity of coming in after the walk.

We will be setting up a walk rota for parents in the first few days of term. If you are able to do more than one walk per week, or if you are living in close proximity to kindergarten, and can walk us over from or back to kindergarten without staying with us the whole walk please let us know. We will have hand sanitiser and tissues with us while outside. We ask parents to let the teachers wipe children's noses. If you are in any doubt about the cleanliness of children's or your own hands, please just ask to use hand sanitiser.

I will be asking for email addresses for parents this year as our less spontaneous contact will necessitate more texts and emails in order to communicate. I hope we can make the best of this communication and learn to enjoy it. I will be setting up a What's App group with all kindergarten parents so you can communicate with the teachers and each other. Please let me know if you would rather not be involved with this. Any suggestions you have for changes or new ideas for our new procedures, or just in general, are welcomed. This is your kindergarten.

### **When to Stay At Home:**

A child who is not feeling well is not able to participate in our day in a meaningful way. She/he feels out-of-sync and needs the loving care of home. In most cases, a child who complains of a tummy ache in the morning really isn't well. Often this marks the beginning of an illness.

With all of the Covid 19 restrictions in place this is more important than ever before. Please do not bring your child to kindergarten if she/he has:

- a fever
- a cough
- shortness of breath
- sore throat
- vomiting or diarrhea
- a headache

a significantly runny nose.

If you have concerns you may ring from 8:30am to speak with the teachers to discuss whether your child is healthy enough to attend kindergarten.

Please do not accompany your child to kindergarten if you are exhibiting any of these symptoms yourself. Remain home and consult your GP. Also it has been strongly recommended that you keep your children at home to isolate for two weeks if you have visitors from countries that are not on the Irish green travel list.

In the case of non-Covid related vomiting and diarrhoea it is now required to leave your child at home for a full 48 hours after the last incidence.

We appreciate advance notice when you know your child will not be at kindergarten so please do text or ring us, even on the same morning your child would attend. In addition please do alert us to any normal childhood illnesses your children have so we can let other parents know, ie chicken pox, head lice, pink eye, etc. We are sensitive to confidentiality in these matters and will not disclose your children's names to other parents.

### **Some Information About Lee, Jans, and Deirdre:**

Lee has joined kindergarten in March 2021. She brings long experience of working with children as a primary teacher. She has worked with children with special needs in a classroom setting. She also had her own kindergarten in Arizona which drew on Steiner, and the Reggio Emilia methods of pedagogy. In addition she has studied nutrition and has many tasty and nutritious ideas for involving children in healthy eating.

Jans is from the Netherlands. She joined kindergarten in March 2021. She studied a Foundation year in Steiner philosophy. She worked in kindergarten previously for 4 months. She also managed and worked at Mol an Oige in their afterschool programme. She has studied drama and yoga. Her daughter attended kindergarten when kindergarten started.

Deirdre has worked as a teacher full time at kindergarten for the past 6 years. She was involved with the kindergarten almost from the beginning, serving on the Board of Management for 3 years as Secretary and Chairperson. She went back to school and retrained in Early Years in Lisdoonvarna, then earned a Diploma in Early Years Education from Carlow IT last year. She volunteered working with the children one or two days per week for 6 years before becoming a teacher. Her original degree was in the arts when she

studied Film and Russian Studies. She also worked at Mol an Oíge National School for three years in the Afterschool programme where she planned camps and the craft programme for children aged 4-12 years.

Thank you for reading this. Do please let us know if you have any questions.