

Burren Sonas Kindergarten

Information for Parents

2023/24

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 19 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 9 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 be 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.

We meet at Gloria's garden where the teachers will be waiting from 9:20 am onwards. We ask that parents respect Gloria's request to walk to her garden and refrain from driving down the lane. Parking is usually available at the Square. Parents are able to drop their children's bags in the side window of kindergarten that is left open for this purpose.

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 of safety and any changes in the surroundings.

We return to kindergarten to change out of outdoor clothes, replacing any clothes underneath 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 crafts or other activities with teachers. While playing freely children re-create, 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, reading stories, 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 sing and speak our seasonal rhymes and songs before 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 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, and trying new foods.

Personal belongings:

We ask that your children do not bring personal toys, dolls, purses, wallets, money, jewellery, watches, games, etc., to kindergarten. Many of these items become a source of anxiety for the children as they can get lost or broken. In addition they can become a source of conflict as other children want to share them.

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 11th of November. Families meet at a parent's house/ other outside location 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 1st 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

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. 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 almost 20 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.

Walk Protocol:

Our insurance requires that we have a ratio of 1 adult per 3 children. This requires us to ask parents to sign up to assist us with the garden time and the walk from the garden back to kindergarten, a period of time from 9:30-11 am. We ask parents to sign up for at least one slot per week. We create a rota which we follow so it is very important that parents sign up for a consistent day. If you cannot make your time please make as much effort as you can to swap with another parent directly, or ask for a swap on the What's App parent group. This would best be done, at the latest, the night before your slot to give enough time to find a replacement.

Being on the walk gives you the chance to see your child in her/his kg environment, and meet the other children and parents. However the safety of the children is paramount at this time so please be aware this comes first. As the garden is spread out with a few areas it is important that there is an adult in the range of the main areas: the climbing trees, the sandpit, the hammock area, the gate, and the tunnel. As we try to minimise the use of mobile phones in kg we ask that parents refrain from using them in the garden as much as possible. If a parent must use a phone please request to watch the gate as that is the most unobtrusive place to use it, and limit the time. Garden time may be a convenient time to informally ask a teacher about your child. If it is possible while keeping children safe, a teacher will be happy to discuss any questions you may have.

The walk back to kg is especially important from a position of safety as we do need to cross a road. There may also be obstructions at the Square or cars coming from the Square down to the houses near Gloria's. When we leave the garden all children must be holding hands, in groups of no more than 4, to an adult. Younger and more vulnerable children should be attached to an adult hand and not on the end of the line. Everyone must wait until all the children are ready and holding hands before departing the garden. It is safer to wait to cross the main road when all the groups have assembled together.

We ask that all parents give the utmost respect to Gloria when entering the garden. Gloria

gives us permission to use her garden on a voluntary basis. Please do not bring animals, drive your car to her gate, or congregate in large numbers in her garden. The teachers will need to ask Gloria's permission before bringing any new toys or equipment to the garden.

We very much appreciate your participation in the walks as we know it is a big commitment to ask parents to come every week.

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.

Photographing and Social Media:

Since Covid 19 we have been making more photographs of children to record their imaginative play, and their times of fun. Many parents also make photographs in the garden and at festivals and celebrations. We ask please that you are sensitive to other

families' need for privacy. Please do not share any group photos -- ie any photos with children other than your own --with friends outside of kg, family, or on any social media platform. We appreciate your discretion and cooperation.

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:

As you will see on your contracts there are optional extras such as food, the extra half hour between 12:30-1pm, and the 50 euro baking/gardening annual fee. For families on the NCS scheme there is an additional family portion due as the NCS does not cover the full cost of childcare. The fees are added together and calculated as 10 payments. Payment of fees is due in advance and are to be paid monthly in 10 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. In 2022 we introduced the option to pay for the full fees in one payment with a 5% discount on the total. A onetime payment allows for less administration costs which would be most appreciated if it is financially possible for you.

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, at the discretion of the Board of Management. This must be applied for formally in writing to the Board to be discussed and approved. 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. These policies have all been updated in January of 2023. 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. 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 or 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.

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 mucousy cough
- shortness of breath
- sore throat
- vomiting or diarrhea
- a headache
- a significantly runny nose that has green mucus.

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 note that in the case of vomiting and diarrhea it is now required by the HSE to leave your child at home for a full 48 hours after the last incidence. For fevers it is at least 24 hours after the child's temperature has normalised.

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.

Collecting your Child:

We understand the need for some families to carpool together, or the times when last minute changes need to happen. We ask that you text us before collection time at 1pm to let us know if there will be a change in collection routines or times. If someone new is collecting your child you must text us the name of the adult, and your permission for this person to collect your child, before collection time or we will not be able to let your child go with this new adult.

Some Information About Jans, Deirdre, and Emma:

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. She has worked as relief worker but has worked full time with the children since January 2023.

Deirdre has worked as a teacher and manager full time at kindergarten for the past 9 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, did the first year of the Steiner teacher training, then earned a Diploma in Early Years Education from Carlow IT in 2020. 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 Oige National School for three years in the Afterschool programme where she planned camps and the craft programme for children aged 4-12 years. She has the role of Lead Teacher, beginning in September 2023 after handing over management to Emma.

Emma joined kindergarten in Spring of 2023. She lives locally and has recently come home after living abroad and managing preschools in Sydney, Australia. She was awarded a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Early Years Education from Mary Immaculate College in 2014. She has had a lot of experience working with children and in administration. She is our new manager, working with the children and doing the administration.

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

