

Burren Sonas Kindergarten

Information for Parents

2024/25

The Burren Sonas Kindergarten Programme

The Burren Sonas Kindergarten serves children 2.5 to 5.5 years old, offering up to five days of attendance from 9:30am - 1:00pm. Enrollment is encouraged for **all five days** of the program to support children to develop a regular rhythm of activity and play with their friends and teachers. The mixed age, play-oriented program 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 20 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 to inform the community 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; we teach through modelling and we strive to be worthy of imitation in all we do. We emphasize caring and respect for each other and Mother Earth through our activities.

We begin our day outside in **Gloria's garden**. It provides an opportunity for children to stretch and move after the drive to kindergarten. Meeting in a natural outdoor environment is a refreshing and peaceful way to begin their day, full of lovely natural play, plants, a trampoline, a sandpit, a hammock and a swing. Children are to be dressed in waterproof clothing and boots upon arrival. We encourage parents to allow children to dress themselves independently, giving assistance only when necessary.

The teachers will be waiting from 9:25 am onwards in the garden. We ask that parents respect Gloria's request to **walk** to her garden from the Square (and refrain from driving down the lane). Parking is usually available in front of the Burren Cafe. Additionally, parents can drop their children's bags in the side window of kindergarten that is left open for this purpose.

If you were on laundry duty, you may ask the teachers for a key to the kindergarten to drop off the laundry into the kitchen, if it is after 9.25am.

Outside we enjoy the chance to run, climb trees and other obstacles, splash in puddles, and stretch our limbs. **Circle time** after our play and tidying up allows us to come together using songs and greet each other by name.

Walking back to kindergarten wearing our hi-vi vests is a time to share a wonderful social experience, as well as developing awareness of safety and any changes in the surroundings. Two adults must always be present to help both in the garden and with our walk back to kindergarten. They must respect the head count, wait for all children and adults to walk together, and when in the garden, they must always assure children's safety, especially near the water hose. **(an adult should always be present near the gate)**

Around 10.45/11am, 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, devising a myriad of games, structures, and imaginative play, using the natural open-ended toys available. During this time children can choose to play alone, in a group, or do crafts, cut fruit, or other activities with teachers. While playing freely children re-create, learn from, and act out what they have seen and experienced in their home lives.

Activities such as craft making, watercolour painting, baking, drawing and coloring, reading stories, and preparing for mealtimes, are offered to children, always with upmost respect to the child's free will.

After free play children and teachers share a small meal together. Children take turns doing jobs like serving bowls of food, or putting out the candle we light while we eat. Before eating, we sing and speak our seasonal rhymes and songs, then we say a blessing of thanksgiving. Mealtimes 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 children can learn the days of the week by knowing that bread day is always Tuesday, or pasta day is always Friday. We 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, while singing the tidy up song (melodies help young children with transitions). Each toy has its place and is respectfully put away with care. We gather at the end of the day for story time, play a game, or watch a puppet show. This provides an opportunity for everyone to relax and breathe together before singing our goodbye song.

Through the experience of a Steiner kindergarten children are supported by the

recurring rhythm of the day, the week, and the yearly rhythm, as is recognized 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. We encourage parents to bring their children as close to this time as possible and not allow children to come in past **10am** (at the very latest). We have found that this disturbs the child's rhythm too much and can also perturb the group as a whole.

The morning generally runs more smoothly for a child arrives on time and enters play with the entire class. If a child is struggling with the transition of saying goodbye, please talk to teachers who can support and give advice to families. *At times it might be necessary for parents to stay a little longer in order to prevent an abrupt separation, but we ask that this is always done in communication with the teachers and respectfully towards other parents and children.*

Clothing

Warmth is very important for young children, as is experiencing the natural world and the seasons. We go outside every day unless 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 available in shops or Puddleducks online.
3. A pair of waterproof boots that a child can put on by themselves.
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 **one** 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 in 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, jewelry, watches, games, etc., to kindergarten, **not even in the garden**. 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 the day of (or near) your child's birthday, we will celebrate together at kindergarten. Parents and siblings can attend the celebration which will take place around 12.20pm on the chosen day.

The teacher will tell a special birthday story. The birthday child will wear a birthday cape and be presented with a handmade birthday gift, decorated beeswax candles, and a birthday book. As we light the candle for each year, the parents can share a small **story/memory** about that particular year of their child's life.

We also ask that the family to make a **handmade cake/treat** to share with all the children. *Please plan to make something low in sugar, without artificial colors and flavors, and bear in mind any allergies (the teachers will specify this).*

If you celebrate by having a party outside of kindergarten in addition to this special celebration, please be sensitive about how you invite children in the kindergarten. If you are not able to invite everyone, please invite children outside of kindergarten time and ask children not to discuss the event at kindergarten time to avoid hurt feelings.

Festivals and Parent Gatherings

Family festivals are an important foundation of forming a kindergarten community. These seasonal celebrations are valuable for children to have family involvement. They support families by having fun together and encouraging a sense of belonging.

We ask families to please assist in preparing and attending these events.

Our main festivals 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. **The Advent Spiral** is celebrated the first Friday of 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 it. This festival symbolises the light of love and courage shining out in the darkness.
3. **Beltaine** is celebrated during kindergarten time on or near the 1st of May to mark the beginning of summer. On this day we gather at the Holy Well where we dance the Maypole and share a small picnic together.
4. **The last day of the year** is 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. We will also share a picnic.

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.

Parent-Teacher Meetings

Meetings between parents and teachers can 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 organization which is now 20 years

old. It has developed and thrived this long only through the involvement of families. We are managed by a community **Board of Management** which voluntarily supports the kindergarten by doing administration and long-term 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 ask parents to volunteer to 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.

Additionally, we have a weekly towel washing which parents are requested to do on a rota system (once every 14 weeks).

There are also various end of term cleaning and repairing tasks. Our 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

Given that we do not have our own outdoor space, when we are in Gloria's garden, it counts as an **outing**. For outings, our insurance requires that we have a ratio of **1 adult per 3** children.

This means parents need to sign up to assist 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 kindergarten environment and meet the other children and parents. However, the safety of the children is paramount so please be aware this comes first.

As the garden is spread out, it is important that there is an adult in the range of the main areas: the climbing trees/bushes, the sandpit, the hammock area, the gate/water hose area, and in the polytunnel. As we try to minimize **the use of mobile**

phones in kindergarten we ask that parents refrain from using them in the garden.

The walk back to kindergarten is especially important from a position of safety. When we leave the garden, **all children** must be holding hands and wearing their hi-vi vests. The teacher will do a **head count** and it is important to wait **together** until this is done and you have been given the OK to walk.

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.**

We very much appreciate your participation in the walks as we understand that, while essential for our littles to get fresh air, it is a big commitment.

A Note About Sleep:

Adequate sleep is extremely important to a child's happy experience in any social setting. 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 (second-hand phone usage)

In kindergarten, perhaps more than anywhere else, we can observe the effects of television watching on the young child. Frequently, it is quite clear who has been watching (and what!) on 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 programs 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 long-term physical, emotional, and mental health issues for children. We ask parents to please give their 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 socializing with other children

and a tendency to lack of focus. We assure you that your children will have no difficulty learning these new technologies later when they are needed.

Additionally, we suggest putting electronic devices away while close to young children. Research has shown that parents frequently on phones or other devices will be perceived as less interactive and present by their children and it will also affect their confidence.

Photographing and Social Media

Since Covid 19 we have been taking more photographs of children to record their imaginative play and their times of fun. Many parents take photographs in the garden, at festivals and celebrations. We ask please that you are sensitive to everyone's need for privacy. Please **do not** share any group photos -ie any photos with children other than your own- with friends outside of kindergarten, family, or on any social media platform. We appreciate your discretion and cooperation.

Learning More About Steiner-Waldorf

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 remember to bring books back to the library.*

Fees

There are optional extras in terms of fees: food, an extra half hour between 12:30 and 1pm, and our annual fee. The fees are added together and calculated as 9 payments. Payment is due in advance, to be paid monthly to our bank account. Fees can also be paid in one go if that is easier.

At the beginning of the year, you will be issued an 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, at the discretion of the Board of Management. This must be applied 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 programs. 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

We have many policies and procedures available on our website to peruse at your leisure. They are also available in hard copy at Burren Sonas kindergarten to look at if you should need, just ask a teacher.

We are required by Tusla to have policies and procedures in place on a wide variety of areas, including: *Child protection, Complaints policy, Outdoor Play 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 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 June 2024. They have been created in accordance to requirements of Tusla and the DCYA and provide a common framework for all of us.

However, the best way to deal with any matter 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 Kilfenora Square. 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. Additionally, parking or even driving near Gloria's garden is prohibited.

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 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 your 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 child is having.

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. Equally, a child who voices that they do not want to be in kindergarten that day needs to be listened to. Children know best what they need.

With 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 deep 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 8am 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 normalized.

We appreciate advance notice when you know your child will not be at kindergarten. Please text or ring us, even on the same morning. *In addition, please alert us asap 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

At the beginning of the school year, we ask that you provide us with the name, telephone number and address of **four** authorized people who can collect your child. No other person apart from the people on this list will be allowed to collect your child. This is for the safety of your child and in accordance with our Authorization to Collect Policy. **Please note that if you are not able to collect your child, you must give us as much notice as possible regarding WHO will collect them.** That person HAS to be on your list.

Some Information About Jans, Blandine and Karen

Jans is from the Netherlands. She joined the Burren Sonas in March 2021. She studied a Foundation year in Steiner philosophy. She worked in kindergarten previously for 4 months and also managed and worked at Mol an Oige in their afterschool program. She has studied drama and yoga. Her daughter attended kindergarten when it started. She has worked as relief worker but has worked full time with us since January 2023.

Blandine is the current Burren Sonas manager and has been with us since January 2024. She acquired her Early Years Educator diploma in France and has worked with children for over seventeen years, travelling to five different countries to gain various experience both in kindergarten and school settings. Before joining the Burren Sonas kindergarten, she had her own Montessori childminding business. She loves painting, reading, and martial arts. Her own education was in a Steiner school which enticed her love for the Steiner ethos.

Karen is our current relief worker and is with us one or two mornings a week depending on demand. Karen is a qualified childcare worker level 6, special needs assistant level 6, and A.I.M.S worker. She loves gardening, creative projects, and spending time at the beach.

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