

# MINISTER FOLEY VISITS MIDDLETOWN CENTRE FOR AUTISM

Middletown Centre for Autism in County Armagh welcomed the Minister for Education Norma Foley TD (Ireland) on Monday 8 April 2024. Minister Foley engaged in discussions with the Board and Senior Management Team about the unique model of autism specific support provided by the Centre. She acknowledged the vital role of the Centre in supporting and disseminating inclusive practices for neurodivergent children and young people across the island of Ireland.

The Minister visited the model training classroom and heard first-hand accounts from staff about the impact of their work on children and young people with autism, their families, schools and the wider community. Minister Foley commended the Centre's team on their person-centred approach and commitment to empowering schools to meet the learning needs of neurodivergent students.

Minister Foley said: "Middletown is a leading authority on best practice in the provision of education for children with autism. Children and young people with autism across Ireland depend on the invaluable support offered to them by the Centre. I have been greatly impressed by the level of skills, knowledge and the commitment by all of the staff I have met. The Centre is an excellent example of the benefits of an all-island approach in the provision of leading edge services, training and research to schools, parents and children."

"I am very impressed by the Centre's outreach work, sharing its wisdom and expertise right across the island. That is of immense importance in establishing and growing best practice in special education."



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Middletown Centre for Autism was established in 2007 to support the promotion of excellence in the education of children and young people with autism. It is jointly funded by the Departments of Education in Ireland and Northern Ireland, supporting neuroaffirmative practices across both jurisdictions.

The Centre provides second level services, which include specialist assessment and learning support for children and young people with autism, comprehensive programmes of training for parents and professionals, postgraduate qualifications and co-produced research and online resources. It also offers information directly to autistic people, their families and schools through an advisory service, podcasts, research bulletins and the Middletown Journal.

Minister Foley congratulated the Board, management, and staff on their excellent work in providing inclusive education.

Mr. Stephen Douthart, CEO of Middletown Centre for Autism, expressed his gratitude, stating, "We thank Minister Foley for her visit and the generous amount of time she dedicated to our organisation. Her deep understanding of our mission, supportive remarks, and commitment to furthering the evolution of our Centre and expanding the work that our team of excellent professionals do in supporting autistic children and young people across this Island are immensely appreciated. We are honoured to have her ongoing support."



*Photography: Eimear Gildernew*