



# RIVERSTON

## SCHOOL

BESPOKE LEARNING FOR LIFE

# Autism Policy

September 2021

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## Purpose and aims

The purpose of this policy is to outline the practices that are expected for all pupils with an autistic spectrum condition to ensure that the best practice is consistent throughout the school and between all members of staff.

It is the school's aim to implement the following principles ...

- Supporting vulnerable children and their families
- Improving the learning experience in school
- Developing skills and lifelong learning
- Promoting innovation in education

... to ensure that all students with autism become

- Successful learners
- Confident individuals
- Effective contributors
- Responsible citizens

This policy includes:

1. Overview of Autism
2. Policy and practices to promote the development of communication
3. Policy and practices to promote the development of social interaction
4. Policy and practices to promote the development of flexibility of thought
5. The impact of ASC on teaching and learning
6. The impact of sensory processing difficulties on learning
7. The impact of ASC on bullying
8. The impact of ASC on emotional well-being
9. Transitions
10. Agreed consistent practices throughout the school
  - The first two minutes of the lesson
  - The last five minutes of the lesson
  - Classroom noticeboard
  - Classroom organisation
11. The school environment, high-arousal areas and the SPELL framework
12. Review

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## 1. An overview of autism

### Autism

Autism is commonly typified by what is known as the triad of impairments (Wing 1996):

- Social Communication
- Social Interaction
- Social Imagination and Flexibility in Thinking

### High Functioning Autism (HFA)

This term is often used but is not found in the diagnostic criteria. It was used to describe people whose Social Communication, Social Interaction and Social Imagination is affected by autism, but whose IQ is within the normal range - no clinical impairment and a standard score of over 70 IQ.

## 2. Promoting the development of Communication

The drive to communicate in social situations is challenging for many people with ASC. Across the spectrum people may vary from being non-verbal to talking at others without being aware of picking up on atypical responses. In these situations a person's expressive language may not be matched by appropriate receptive communication skills. Staff are vigilant to look out for students who –

- Have limited social language, compounding issues related to social interaction. Emotional language may be limited or absent
- Emotional vocabulary may be limited or absent, and facial expressions may be 'flat'. This can give the false impression that persons with ASC lack feelings and emotions. It is therefore vital that the emotional health and well-being of children and young people across the autism spectrum is considered
- May echo speech. The term for this is echolalia. Some individuals will echo speech as a way of helping them to process information and to make sense of what is said. There may be other reasons for echolalia such as anxiety. It is therefore important to observe the level and use by the child of this feature of language
- Pronoun reversal. This simple action means that an individual may say, "You want a drink" when they mean "I want a drink"
- There may be idiosyncrasies in the way individuals with spoken language talk. Such differences can include speaking in a monotonous tone. There may also be difficulties with the rhythm, pitch and intonation of speech. Many children on the spectrum speak with an accent that differs from their local accent; this is usually an American accent
- Literal interpretation of language is a common feature in children with ASC. Metaphors and similes can be difficult to interpret. Difficulties in abstracting intention and implied meaning can lead to many social misunderstandings
- As a result of a tendency to take language literally, pupils with ASC may be unable to understand the subtleties of classroom behaviour and may speak up to report on other pupils' behaviour when their peers might maintain a steady silence – this too can lead to isolation in the peer group
- Understanding facial expressions. Subtle expressions may be difficult to perceive and process. Children may also find it problematic to join the communicative dots:

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meaning they may not make the connections between what is said, how it is said and the body language and facial expressions that are used in congruence. This can lead to misunderstandings as some will not find it easy to interpret others intonation to derive the correct meaning

- Individuals with ASC may have an unusual way of using social eye gaze. Eye gaze is a helpful social communicative tool that typically developing individuals may use to include or exclude people from conversation. It can also signal that conversations are about to end or that there is something in our field of reference that we wish to draw to another's attention. Children and young people with ASC may avoid eye contact or use it very intensely and as a result will stare at people in a way that can be unnerving. Some people with ASC have reported that they use their peripheral vision as they find eye contact or the more usual use of eye gaze uncomfortable. Others say they don't make eye contact as it distracts them from hearing and understanding what is being said
- Children and young people with ASC frequently behave in ways that are difficult for others to understand. Such behaviour may be a form of communication. It can be more productive to view behaviour in this way and to develop supportive communication strategies rather than to assume there is a behaviour problem per se

### **3. Promoting the development of Social interaction**

Social interaction is often considered to be at the core of ASC. The innate drive for social contact that most individuals have is fraught with complexity when a child is on the spectrum. There are a huge range of issues that relate to social interaction across the spectrum. The following is indicative of some of the observable social behaviour of pupils on the spectrum:

- Some children may appear to have no desire for social contact and may appear to be socially aloof. Such children tend to have a more classical presentation of autism
- Appreciating the reciprocal nature of interaction can be challenging. Such children may find it difficult to engage in shared activities, team games and social conversation
- A lack of social curiosity can inhibit the development of relationships. Not knowing how to build and use social knowledge of other people, their likes, dislikes, interests, ambitions etc can be a barrier to friendship
- Pupils with ASC have a tendency to be rule bound. This can be a tremendous asset in terms of compliance within the classroom but can greatly inhibit social development. In social situations the rules are more fluid and flexible and often change depending on contextual and environmental factors. Such adjustment and flexibility is challenging and stressful for pupils with ASC
- Children and young people may have a very superficial, literal understanding of friendship, e.g. a friend is someone you sit next to in class. The complex incremental development of relationships is often hidden to the child on the spectrum and consequently social misunderstandings are frequent, stressful and demoralising
- Pupils with ASC may appear to show little or no awareness of the needs and feelings of others. This can often be interpreted as a lack of empathy. It is however more likely that what is lacking is understanding. Individuals with ASC often have to solve relationship puzzles by intellect rather than intuition. This can lead to

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misunderstandings and also indicates support is needed to acquire the skills to problem solve in social situations

- Social imitation is a key skill in developing social behaviour. Whilst many children with ASC are excellent mimics they find social imitation more challenging. Pupils with ASC are less likely to observe and follow the social behaviour of other pupils. They may therefore appear to lack motivation to conform to the behavioural norms of the classroom but it is more likely they lack the knowledge of what is expected and that they are not gleaning such information from observation of their peers
- There is a great risk of vulnerability for pupils with ASC. Such children often have an awareness of their differences and a desire for “normality”. This can render them vulnerable to bullying and manipulation by other children who may capitalise on their social naivety in the classroom and the playground as well as on the way to and from school

#### **4. Promoting the development of Social imagination and Flexibility of thought**

Imagination supports a great deal of our social and intellectual growth. It has an obvious role in early life in relation to play, social and cognitive development. There are often noticeable idiosyncrasies in terms of the nature and quality of play observed in very young children with ASC e.g. they may focus on aspects of a toy such as the wheels of a toy car and enjoy them on a sensory level rather than as a typically developing child might.

Socially, a child with autism may be observed to play alongside other children rather than with them, again the implications are significant. Social imagination plays a critical role in guiding social behaviour. Individuals with ASC find it very difficult to think in a future-oriented way and to speculate about what may occur and how they might react, behave or respond to a given situation. Consequently their social behaviour is often reactive. Individually, children and young people may be limited in their capacity to rehearse mentally how they might behave at assembly, on a school outing, to a supply teacher or to a whole range of scenarios about which typically developing children may be able to make assumptions because they can assemble a coherent cognitive picture.

Other issues include:

- Appreciating the perspective of others and recognising the impact one’s own behaviour can have on other people
- The retention and application of sequences may be difficult to keep in mind. Visual reminders may be needed to support the execution of routines, even those that are regularly repeated
- Many pupils with ASC will prefer to complete tasks rather than return to them as breaking and shifting attention can be difficult. There are supports that can be put in place to compensate for this but it may be a source of anxiety
- Generalising skills and behaviour may be problematic
- Pupils with ASC are prone to rigid and inflexible thinking and this can manifest in a whole range of ways e.g. insistence on sameness: the pupil may always want to sit in the same place. Such rigidity can impinge on other areas such as diet; many children with ASC eat a limited range of foods

- Literal interpretation of language linked with inflexible thinking can lead to a range of issues e.g. conceptualising the passage of time. If the pupil is told “we will finish at 10am” he/she is likely to expect to finish precisely at that time. Similarly vague references to time such as “we will do that later” may provoke anxiety as they are meaningless to the child with ASC
- Children and young people with ASC tend towards routine and sameness indeed for some there is a high level of dependency on both. This aspect of ASC is often misconstrued as meaning that there must never be any change around pupils with ASC. This is misleading. Change and unpredictability are part of daily life. However the pupil will not become desensitised to change just because it occurs around them and it can be a source of stress and anxiety. It is important to recognise the extent to which this may be an issue for an individual pupil. Minimising unnecessary change and involving the pupil where possible will be beneficial.

The key to thinking about these issues is to have an awareness of Social Communication, Social Interaction, and Social Imagination and Flexible Thinking and to understand the different impact of each aspect of the Triad for each individual pupil.

## **5. The impact of pupils with ASC on teaching and learning**

All topics in this section relate to the impact ASC has on the various aspects of teaching and learning. An overview of how processing information, cognition and motivation for learning are affected is essential in order to set all the following issues in context.

There are three principal explanations of autism:

1. Affective explanations of autism
2. Cognitive explanations of autism
3. Explanations which combine both affective and cognitive perspectives

Many individuals with ASC cope with sensory processing difficulties and these can have an impact on day-to-day functioning.

Additionally, Wing’s ‘Triad of Impairments’ (Wing and Gould, 1979) provides insight into a range of observable behaviours associated with ASC. In an educational context it is essential to marry this with an understanding of both affective and cognitive explanations of autism in order that behaviours and approaches to learning are understood and supported by appropriate teaching methods.

The motivation of individuals with autism is also an important area to consider.

### **5.1 Affective Explanations of Autism**

Affective explanations of autism focus on differences within the systems of emotional and interpersonal connection which are fundamental to personal relatedness and motivations to engage and communicate with others (Kanner, 1943; Hobson, 1993; Trevarthen, Aitken, Papoudi and Robarts, 1998). Differences in these systems are understood to impact on shared feelings, shared play, and joint attention, and influence social and communicative development and the development of self-concept. These systems underpin many subtle, almost hidden, aspects of communication and interaction, such as the timing of social interactions, sympathetic awareness of the feelings of another person, and awareness of a shared focus of attention. Implications of this may be seen in difficulties in holding conversations, such as turn-taking and keeping on topic, difficulties in the awareness of listener reaction and the emotional responses of others in activities, and difficulties in playing with others and forming friendships.

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## 5.2 Cognitive Explanations of Autism

Currently three dominant psychological theories prevail and attempt to provide explanations of autism, these are that:

- (a) Individuals on the spectrum have an impaired Theory of Mind mechanism
- (b) Individuals on the spectrum have a weak drive for Central Coherence
- (c) Individuals on the spectrum have impairments in a range of executive functions

### 5.2 (a) Theory of Mind

Theory of Mind emerges in typical development around 2 – 4 years. It is the cognitive mechanism that enables the ability to appreciate the perspectives of others and to recognise that others have thoughts, desires, beliefs and mental states that are unique. Significant research in relation to deficits in theory of mind in children with ASC was conducted by Baron-Cohen, Leslie and Frith (Frith, 1989).

Whilst poorly developed theory of mind does not provide a complete account of the spectrum and associated challenges, it can be helpful in unpacking some of the aspects of social behaviour that are perplexing for children on the spectrum and difficult for those around them to understand. An impaired theory of mind may be implicated in a range of the behaviours observed in children and young people on the spectrum such as the difficulties and challenges they face in:

- Empathising
- Appreciating the perspective of others
- Forming and sustaining relationships
- Social prediction
- Social curiosity
- Interpreting the intentions of others
- Predicting and understanding the consequences and the impact of behaviour on others

(Adapted from Cumine, Leach and Stevenson, 1998)

### 5.2 (b) Central Coherence

Central Coherence is the simultaneous cognitive processing of a range of information or stimuli that may appear unrelated to build meaning and understanding. This process enables us to make sense of contextual information and is implicated in a range of cognitive skills as well as guiding behaviour. It is suggested that in individuals with ASC the drive for central coherence is weak. This may result in fragmented processing of details and information that makes it difficult for individuals to construct meaning. This may result in serial processing i.e. one thing at a time rather than simultaneous processing (Frith, 1989). The implications of weak processing in this area may explain why it is difficult for individuals on the spectrum to:

- See and make connections in a range of contexts
- Generalise skills – seeing the relationship between what is expected and what is already known
- Focus attention
- Appreciate alternative perspectives

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- Cope with environmental variables or that which is unknown or unfamiliar
- Choose and prioritise
- Organise and plan

(Adapted from Cumine et al, 1998)

*Example: Idiosyncratic focus of attention*

A teacher was working with a primary school class. Anne, a pupil with ASC, was particularly difficult to engage in teacher led activities or settle to tasks. It was story time and the pupils were gathered on the carpet. Anne seemed to be listening very intently to the story and the teacher was delighted. At the end of the story Anne put up her hand, the teacher was very excited because this was the most engaged Anne had been. When the teacher asked Anne what her question was Anne stated, "Your nostrils are different shapes!"

### **Executive Dysfunction**

Executive function difficulties are not unique to individuals with ASC however research suggests that for this population they are more severe and are different in type and onset than in other conditions (Klin, Volkmar and Sparrow, 2000) This is perhaps one of the most complex areas as executive function is the term used to describe a collection of cognitive mechanisms that are implicated in a range of areas such as:

- Behaviour that is involved in developing and working towards a goal
- Systematic problem solving
- Flexibility of thought and behaviour
- Controlling inappropriate impulses and self-control
- The guiding of behaviour by mental models or internal representations

(Jordan, 1999)

Whilst no theory completely explains the spectrum there are elements of all that are helpful in guiding educationalists towards appropriate supports and teaching strategies based on an appreciation of the diverse cognitive styles of children and young people on the spectrum. Theories can therefore be used to inform practice and to develop empathy for individuals on the spectrum.

### **5.2 (c) A Combined Theory of Autism**

Recent explanations of autism suggest that it is helpful to combine understandings from cognitive and affective theories of autism, using insights from both neuropsychological and developmental models (Sigman, Spence and Wang, 2006). Affective theories are based on developmental knowledge and developmental approaches, rather than heavily relationship based interventions, and may provide a way forward in the early years. By linking insight into early social difficulties with cognitive explanations more suited to older children, it is possible to see an important link between the capacity to respond through joint attention and the better adult outcomes associated with the acquisition of spoken language by age five.

### **Sensory Processing**

Many individuals on the spectrum report difficulties with processing sensory information. This remains a relatively under researched area and therefore understanding is by no means

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advanced in this area. Theorists and researchers continue to debate and investigate the possible cause of sensory integration and processing difficulties for people across the autism spectrum however at a practice level, accepting and supporting are perhaps more essential to understanding the impact on teaching and learning.

Children with ASC often experience sensory processing issues that may present in an obvious or subtle fashion. The impact of these sensory sensitivities can be significant, and what can be perceived as bad behaviour may in fact be a sensory response to an uncomfortable stimulus. We have 7 different sensory systems and a child may experience processing difficulties in one or more systems:

- Vestibular (movement/balance)
- Proprioceptive (body awareness)
- Tactile (touch)
- Visual (sight)
- Olfactory (smell)
- Auditory (hearing)
- Gustatory (taste)

It is important to allow the child time to 'be autistic' rather than to expect him to comply with normal behavioural patterns at all times. Whilst it is not appropriate, and indeed can be distracting for other pupils, if a child is hand-flapping all the time, it is essential to take account of this and create times when he can indulge in sensory behaviour. It is suggested that the child has a 'sensory box' containing various textured, vibrating or visual toys, that he is able to spend 5 minutes playing with at scheduled times throughout the day. Consultation with an Occupational Therapist may be useful in order to obtain further information on classroom strategies specific to your pupil, and for assistance in creating a sensory box suitable for the individual pupil's needs.

Children who have difficulties with sensory processing can often have issues with co-ordination, so may present as having problems with writing tasks or self-care skills such as tying shoelaces, doing zips and buttons, or cleaning themselves effectively after being at the toilet. Again please consult an Occupational Therapist for support to address these issues.

## **Motivation**

Children and young people on the spectrum are capable of prolonged periods of engagement and focused attention. This is generally evident when the focus is related to something that is in keeping with their special interest or that they find motivating. Children and young people may also present as lacking in attention or display behaviour that is distracting for other pupils.

Young children are likely to need repetitive and specific teaching in order for them to acquire appropriate learning behaviour such as sitting, sharing, turn taking, listening, asking and responding to questions. They may find collaborative or group learning challenging and may appear not to have the same natural curiosity as their peers. In order to acquire learning behaviour and to enable pupils on the spectrum to sustain motivation and engagement it will be important to establish what is motivating for them and to maximise the use of intrinsic and extrinsic personal motivators in their teaching and learning. It is important to recognise that these may be non-traditional and linked to specific interests. Social motivators such as supporting peers or pleasing the teacher or their parents may not impact to the same degree

## **Part of Chatsworth Schools**

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as it might with typically developing children and young people. Similarly children and young people may, for some of the reasons discussed find it difficult to formulate personal goals and targets and to work strategically towards them. They may not recognise or value their achievements. This is an area where individual and personalised support may be needed.

**Stress and anxiety**

Pupils on the autism spectrum are known to experience high levels of anxiety which impacts on their ability to function appropriately in some contexts and be receptive to learning. Staff may question the inconsistent patterns and root cause of inappropriate behaviours, e.g. he can do it in the drama group so he should be able to do it in the gym hall. We all perform differently depending on our environment and mood, e.g. an experienced driver can negotiate familiar routes while chatting, listening to music, eating, etc. but if you were to drive in an unfamiliar city these skills would be much poorer, you may only be able to concentrate on direction signs, finding the radio or another person talking distracting.

Stress levels must be monitored and reasonable allowances made to enable pupils to cope with the environment and access the curriculum as fully as possible.

Sometimes the source of a pupil’s anxiety will be clear, however, what can be more challenging for adults is when pupils respond adversely to anticipated events or reactions, for example, bells ringing, school outings, responses from peers. These responses and feelings are very real for pupils on the autism spectrum even when they are associated with events or activities usually perceived as enjoyable or innocuous.

*Example: Anticipation*  
 Andrew, a Primary 2 pupil was frequently showing signs of distress and would attempt to leave the classroom. Discussion with his parents revealed this was also occurring at home. No clear trigger was apparent to staff or parents. After a period of persistent, close observation it became clear that Andrew had an intense fear of the animated BBC2 jingle. The problem for staff and parents in identifying this trigger was that Andrew was already upset by the time it appeared having anticipated the event. This was resolved by being able to acknowledge with Andrew that staff knew it upset him and that they would ensure that the TV was turned off before the logo would appear.

**Overview of the impact of ASC on teaching and learning**

Impact of ASC	Responding to the needs of pupils with ASC
Difficulty forming and sustaining relationships due to limited awareness and appreciation for the perspective of others. This may be interpreted by others as a lack of empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An acknowledgment of how significant social interaction skills are in enabling pupils to engage with a range of learning opportunities</li> <li>• An acceptance that difficulties in this area are a core aspect of ASC and that children will benefit from being valued as individuals with a different social perspective</li> <li>• Time is needed to explore and identify learning opportunities within social situations.</li> <li>• A range of approaches can be adapted to support learning in this area. Additionally natural opportunities for social learning need to be maximised e.g. playground activities, dining hall and community activities</li> </ul>
Predicting and understanding the consequences and the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding the social behaviour of pupils with ASC can be complex. It is tempting to view the</li> </ul>

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<p>impact of behaviour on others may be problematic.</p>	<p>responses and reactions and motivation of pupils from a typical perspective. Whilst behaviour needs to be addressed it is essential that attempts are made to understand the ways in which ASC has been a factor and that behaviour can often result from communication difficulties or from prolonged exposure to highly stressful situations. It is important to remember that some pupils with ASC will find even the most basic of social situations anxiety provoking</p>
<p>Seeing and making connections in a range of contexts may be challenging. Skills learned in one environment may not automatically be replicated in another</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a need for continuous assessment across all areas. Assessment will need to take account of environmental and contextual factors. Do not assume because a child demonstrates competence in one setting that this will be generalised to a range of contexts. This means more detailed and comprehensive approaches to assessment may be required to ensure an accurate profile of skills and abilities is being formed</li> </ul>
<p>Focus of attention may be inconsistent and out of step with teachers' expectations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual supports may be needed to enable the pupil to direct their attention appropriately e.g. use of maths window, highlighting sections that need to be read. The teacher may also need to check that the focus is as expected as it may frustrate pupils to feel that they are carrying out tasks when they find a mismatch of expectations. Adults may also become frustrated by what may appear to be a lack of concentration and focus. In reality most children with ASC will be trying hard to process information but may not always be on the right track</li> </ul>
<p>Coping with the unknown or unfamiliar may be stressful and may have a negative impact on behaviour</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan and prepare for new situations by using strategies such as appropriate visual supports, social stories or by a familiar and trusted adult explaining what will happen. This is especially important if plans need to change. Pupils with ASC are less likely to respond negatively to change if it is signalled and explained in a way they can understand</li> </ul>
<p>Choosing and prioritising may be problematic and may be linked to difficulties with predicting outcomes and consequences</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sometimes it may be necessary to limit choices in order to make the decision more manageable for the pupil. This does not need to mean that access to experiences or opportunities are closed off but that pupils with ASC may need to learn the consequences of decision making in a more incremental way</li> </ul>
<p>Self and task organisation, planning and working sequentially and systematically may be difficult and idiosyncratic</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategies which support planning such as using checklists, schedules or colour coded work sheets will support problems with prioritising and working in a systematic way</li> </ul>
<p>Flexibility of thought and behaviour: The ability to cope</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is important that such inflexibility is not misinterpreted as belligerent or non-compliant</li> </ul>

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<p>with change and interpret and act on information in a range of different contexts can be problematic. This may result in a tendency for rigid thinking and processing that manifests in inflexible behaviour patterns and responses</p>	<p>behaviour. Staff need to understand the child's perspective and support them to work through the inflexibility. Pupils will need help to understand that people have different thoughts and feelings to their own. Pupils need to consider alternative responses to challenging situations in a supportive non-judgemental environment</p>
<p>Controlling inappropriate impulses and self-control. Pupils may be compelled to engage in a range of behaviours that may be considered impulsive or repetitive. E.g. flicking light switches on and off</p>	<p>It is important to establish:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the behaviour a problem?</li> <li>• If so who is it a problem for?</li> <li>• What purpose or function does the behaviour serve?</li> <li>• Why might a pupil respond in this way?</li> <li>• What steps can be taken to support them to behave differently?</li> <li>• What can you offer to compensate or motivate the child in place of the behaviour?</li> <li>• These are key questions because adults need to be aware that pupils with ASC will present a wide range of challenges, it is impossible to tackle everything at once, therefore it is important to establish why behaviour may be viewed as problematic. If you simply attempt to extinguish a particular behaviour, an equally or indeed more inappropriate behaviour may develop</li> </ul>
<p>Reflection on one's own actions, behaviours, experiences and expressions may be limited. This may manifest in an inability to place oneself in an experience or to see the relationship between their actions, outcomes and the responses of others</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategies that promote self-awareness and self-reflection are important. This can be reinforced by consistent use of pupil self-evaluation tools. Consolidation that focuses, not just on content, but on process, e.g. what did you do, who did you do it with, what occurred, how might it have been done differently. This is a core area of difficulty for pupils on the spectrum, they are likely to need ongoing teaching and support to be able to successfully locate themselves in their own experiences and to be able to reflect on those experiences for future learning or habituation of actions</li> </ul>

## 6. The impact of sensory processing difficulties on learning

Tactile processing issues	Responding to the needs of pupils with ASC
<p>Child is uncomfortable with light touch and can become upset / aggressive if touched unexpectedly</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure the child is seated near the back and side of the class so he can see others moving towards him</li> <li>• Delineate the area the child is to sit on during 'Circle Time' or floor work by using a carpet tile (even better give each child their own tile so as not to make the one child different). Ensure others are not sitting too close</li> <li>• Ensure the child is either at the front or the back of the line for coming in/out class. Allow the child to be door monitor so he can hold the door open and all others can pass through ahead of him</li> </ul>

## Part of Chatsworth Schools

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrange for the child to be allowed into the dinner hall ahead of their peers so he can get sorted and seated before the rush starts</li> <li>• Forewarn the child before you touch him, by saying his name first and moving through his visual field to reach him</li> <li>• Do not force the child to participate in messy play e.g. finger painting etc. but allow him alternatives such as using a paintbrush</li> </ul>
<b>Visual processing issues</b>	<b>Responding to the needs of pupils with ASC</b>
Child finds bright lights uncomfortable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natural light is a better option than strip lighting, both from a visual and auditory perspective, so avoid artificial light sources if it is a bright day</li> <li>• Allow the child to wear a skip cap; if not allowed in class then at least allow him to use in the playground and for PE classes being held outside</li> </ul>
Child uses vision as a stimulus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep classroom environment as clutter-free as possible. If your preferred teaching style is to have busy walls then ensure the child has a screened off workstation with high sides, blank walls and a visual timetable only</li> <li>• Allow the child some small visual toys for their sensory box, that he may play with during timetabled 'sensory breaks'</li> </ul>
<b>Auditory processing issues</b>	<b>Responding to the needs of pupils with ASC</b>
The child is easily distracted by loud or extraneous noise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shut doors or windows to reduce external noise</li> <li>• Pre-warn the child before any tests of the fire alarm system</li> <li>• Allow the child to use headphones whilst working</li> <li>• Ear plugs might help in situations such as assembly/dinner hall etc. During assembly ensure the child is seated at the end of a row, next to the teacher/adult if possible</li> <li>• Reduce the amount of electrical equipment used during times of concentration</li> <li>• The noise of a pencil on paper can be uncomfortable and the child may prefer to use a ballpoint pen</li> </ul>
The child hums constantly (either to block out extraneous noise or because he is seeking auditory input)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the child needs to hum to concentrate, teach him to do so quietly. Position him in class where he is less distracting to others</li> <li>• Giving the child a vibrating toy to hold in this hand whilst working, or allowing him to sit on a vibrating cushion can reduce the degree of humming</li> </ul>
<b>Olfactory processing issues</b>	<b>Responding to the needs of pupils with ASC</b>
The child is sensitive to smell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be aware that your perfume or aftershave might elicit an adverse reaction in a child with olfactory sensitivity</li> <li>• Avoid the use of air fresheners etc in the classroom</li> <li>• Be aware of the strong smells of some cleaning products</li> </ul>
<b>Concentration issues</b>	<b>Responding to the needs of pupils with ASC</b>

## Part of Chatsworth Schools

The child needs to calm and focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get the whole class to do 'chair press-ups' prior to any writing activity</li> <li>• Use weighted 'wheat germ bags' laid over the child's knees, shoulders or back of the neck to provide additional proprioceptive input during desk based tasks</li> <li>• Have plenty movement breaks throughout the day</li> </ul>
The child tends to rock in chair or fidget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow the child to play with a fidget toy whilst working and listening. Small keyrings or pencil toppers can be a discreet way of providing a 'fidget opportunity'</li> <li>• Provide the child with a 'Move 'n' sit' cushion or allow them to sit on a therapy ball during periods when intense concentration is required</li> <li>• Have plenty movement breaks throughout the day</li> <li>• Use a 'Move 'n' sit' or therapy ball as above</li> <li>• Carry out action songs (e.g. 'Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes' or 'Alive, Alert, Awake, Enthusiastic') as a class activity prior to periods of concentration</li> </ul>
The child appears slouched or lethargic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Precede any period of sitting with a burst of active movement e.g. star jumps, skipping etc</li> </ul>
<b>Organisational skills</b>	<b>Responding to the needs of pupils with ASC</b>
Children with ASC benefit from structure and routine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use visual timetables to enable the child to know what comes next</li> <li>• Use a timer for set pieces of work and for 'sensory breaks'</li> <li>• Ensure that trays and workbooks are clearly labelled</li> <li>• For secondary school pupils ensure that workbooks, timetables, school plans and classroom doors are colour-coded</li> </ul>

## 7. The impact of ASC on bullying

<b>Impact of ASC</b>	<b>Responding to the needs of pupils with ASC</b>
Core difficulties in social relatedness and understanding will often have a significant impact on the person. For example a pupil with an ASC is unlikely to be socially motivated to fit into the crowd or follow fashion trends: such a pupil may not be motivated by the same types of things as other pupils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess and develop self-awareness skills in areas related to their vulnerabilities. There are numerous practical resources to help in this area; there are also specific interventions developed to support this area of functioning</li> </ul>
They may like things that seem 'odd' to other pupils and teachers. This can cause them to 'stand out' in a crowd and they can then be susceptible to bullying in response to their difference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing alternative opportunities, such as 'safe communities' within the school (examples of these can be chess clubs, library or a base to have breaks and lunch)</li> </ul>

## Part of Chatsworth Schools

There are challenges within the social context resulting from interpersonal engagement, processing the social meaning and awareness of others perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide social skills training opportunities, but be aware of the limitations of generalising these skills. (Use this as a means of raising the pupil's self-awareness or as an informative informal assessment to guide strategies of support)</li> </ul>
Difficulty interpreting unspoken meanings behind words can result in the pupil being vulnerable to the intentions of others. Pupils with ASC can often become 'targets' as their social naivety can be very apparent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach 'signs of bullying' so that the pupil is aware of what behaviours indicate bullying</li> <li>• Ensure the school anti-bullying policy specifically mentions ASC and the response to be taken to incidents and bullying behaviour. Respect me national anti-bullying service can support the development of and refreshment of policies and provide training for staff</li> <li>• Help the pupil to understand the school's anti-bullying policy</li> <li>• Provide 'assertiveness training' but be aware of the possible impact of inflexible thinking and that the pupil may rigidly apply a set response in a variety of different contexts. Additionally, they may not be able to initiate this response in a social situation. Continue to monitor and adapt your support strategies and provide visual supports to augment their learning</li> </ul>
A pupil with ASC may have a single minded focus on developing friendships. They may desperately want a friend and can misinterpret kindness for friendship and become attached to someone who does not consider them a friend. Inflexibility of thought and a lack of appreciation of the others feelings may result in rejection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider providing a 'buddy system' or someone who can 'look out' for them and report any situation that they feel are of concern for the person</li> </ul>
A pupil with ASC may be motivated to 'fit in' with the crowd, but lack the social awareness that they are being 'exploited' by others. Some people engage in 'anti-social' activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide visually timetabled 'social translation' sessions. This can provide an opportunity within the day for the pupil to discuss situations they may not have understood or that have been picked up as social misunderstandings by teachers</li> </ul>

## 8. The impact of ASC on emotional well-being

Impact of ASC	Responding to the needs of pupils with ASC
The pupil with ASC may possess a scattered profile of abilities however the core areas of difficulty being primarily in social communication, social interaction, play, imagination and flexible thinking mean that	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present structured opportunities for group interaction within the school day. Use information gathered from baseline assessments of their profile of abilities. Prepare the pupil for group interaction through visually timetabled information of when and for how long group interaction sessions will take place. Develop visual materials</li> </ul>

## Part of Chatsworth Schools

they may be less likely to engage in shared experiences. This may impact on their motivation to join in group activities, such as social games and sports	to support their expected involvement and incorporate the involvement of others within the interactions
Misunderstandings may arise due to the pragmatics of language, interpersonal engagement (they may misinterpret the unspoken meanings within the interaction)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide written information (if at their cognitive level) of the rationale for participating in such an activity. This information should attempt to address such issues as difficulties with theory of mind (others perspective) and difficulties with central coherence (getting the social meaning)</li> </ul>
A lack of understanding of social interaction skills and missing the social context of situations often leaves the pupil with ASC on the periphery and often isolated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accept that there may be areas of 'blindness' within the social interplay that they not be able to achieve naturally or through adaptations</li> </ul>
The pupil with ASC may possess difficulties with a range of emotional management skills. There may be little awareness of internal states such as feelings of anxiety, anger or sadness. Due to the high social demands of school pupils are often experiencing high levels of anxiety or stress. Emotional awareness may not occur until the pupil loses control in an outburst that may appear to others as coming from nowhere. Difficulties processing others perspectives, a lack of awareness of others emotional states and a limited ability to emotionally match others moods are all indicative of a lack of emotional understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use pupil's interest to aid success within the group activity. This can then be used as a concrete experience and a reference point to encourage further involvement within other less favoured group activities</li> </ul>
Understanding self-awareness may require focused teaching. Specialist approaches to teaching understanding of their own condition may be required. They may develop more awareness of their differences within a mainstream peer group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a visual emotional understanding programme</li> </ul>
Difficulties building positive self-esteem  Rigidity of thought and need for sameness may result with difficulties arising from difficulties with executive functioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach the associations of feelings with experience. This requires immediate association, therefore, when they show behaviours that indicate a feeling or state, teach this association immediately. Augment this learning by developing concrete visual supports (such as an 'emotions folder')</li> </ul>

## Part of Chatsworth Schools



<p>Difficulties building emotional resilience</p> <p>A pupil may possess limited self-awareness and therefore may not be aware of internal feelings or mood states</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing the person with ASC specific counselling if they reach a state of distress (remember it is essential that the person providing therapeutic counselling is aware of the profile of abilities). Counselling may be useful for more able pupils and should be accessed only if the young person wishes to access this type of therapeutic support</li> </ul>
<p>A 'fragile sense of self' may leave pupils vulnerable to additional mental health difficulties</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach others to understand the pupils 'differences' by having awareness-raising sessions (this should only occur if the pupil and their parents have given their consent. Some pupils with Asperger Syndrome are very private regarding disclosing their condition to others).</li> <li>• Help the person understand their condition and the impact this has. This can be done with specific resources - see 'I am Special' (Vermulen, 2001) or with specialist therapeutic group interventions</li> </ul>

## 9. Transitions

Transitions can be very problematic for pupils on the autistic spectrum due mainly to their cognitive processing of the environment and need for predictability. Children are likely to have difficulties with:

- Interpreting the thoughts/feelings/expectations of new people (Theory of Mind)
- Understanding or establishing appropriate new routines (weak Central Coherence)
- Planning and organisation (Executive Functioning)
- Sensory processing

All of the above can provoke high levels of anxiety and may result in unusual behaviours or responses, such as:

- Fear
- Inappropriate reactions due to lack of social understanding and what behaviour is expected
- Attempts to keep environment the same, or negative responses to transition interfering with existing structures
- Non compliance
- Behaviour that adults find challenging

### Pupils need to know...

- Where they have to be
- Who might be there
- What they will/should be doing
- What behaviour is expected

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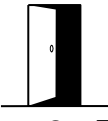

- How much they have to do
- How they will know they are finished
- What they will be doing next

(Division TEACCH, 2006)

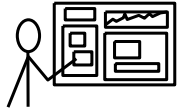
These points are not unreasonable: as adults we tend to expect children to do what they are told without question. However, if sent on a course or to a meeting most of us would be uncomfortable without at least the above information!

## 10. Agreed consistent practices throughout the school

As part of the school's continuing professional development programme, it has been agreed that certain practices throughout the school would be made consistent across classes and year groups. This will ensure a consistent and predictable routine for all pupils, thereby reducing anxiety and enabling pupils to focus better.

 <b>The first two minutes</b>	
	<p><b>1. Line up</b>  <i>Pupils line up quietly outside the classroom</i></p>
	<p><b>2. Greet and calm</b>  <i>Teacher greets the pupils with an expectation of silence</i>  <i>Check that students are dressed appropriately (e.g. top buttons, shirts) in a state of readiness for learning</i></p>
	<p><b>3. Enter the classroom</b>  <i>Pupils enter the classroom and stand behind their desk/table</i>  <i>Teacher instructs pupils to sit down</i></p>
	<p><b>4. Readiness for learning</b>  <i>Pupils sit down</i>  <i>Take out books, stationery and Student Planner</i>  <i>Place bags on the floor beside or underneath the desk/table (not on it)</i>  <i>Homework tasks are collected</i></p>

Part of Chatsworth Schools



## 5. Learning objective and lesson structure

Visual on the board with learning objective and an outline structure of the lesson  
(agreed format to be used)

Teacher explains learning objective



## Structure the last five minutes



### 1. Warning to finish

Offer a warning five minutes before pupils are due to complete their work.  
For some pupils, this may need to be longer and more repetitive; for some a visual may appropriate (for example, a stopwatch or sand timer)



### 2. Lesson content ends five minutes early

Depending on the pupil group, it may be appropriate to plan to finish ahead of the end of the lesson to ensure there is time for the 'clear-up' and to enable pupils to leave the lesson in a calm way



### 3. Plenary

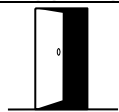
Assess learning  
Recap learning objective – has it been achieved?



### 4. Homework

Staff to ensure pupils –  
(a) Record homework clearly, legibly and accurately  
(b) Understand the homework task

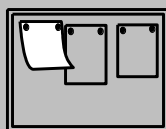
It may be appropriate/helpful to have the homework task printed and cut up so that staff can support pupils to stick it in their planner, thereby reducing the time this can take



### 5. Leaving the classroom

Pupils pack away their books and other belongings  
Stand behind their desk/table ready to be dismissed by the teacher

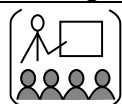
*Pupils leave in a calm and orderly fashion, supported by learning support staff as appropriate*



## Classroom noticeboard

All pupils will be able to expect a certain amount of consistent information on the main information board in every classroom. It is accepted that most classrooms are also form rooms so some information will be only pertinent to the form. Other information, however, should be relevant to all pupils.

The agreed consistent font to be used is Arial.



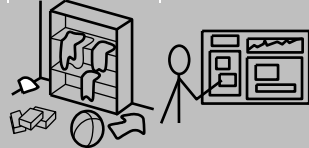
### For the form

- Visual timetables (for both sets as necessary), including lesson times
- Student rota (if appropriate)



### For all students and visitors

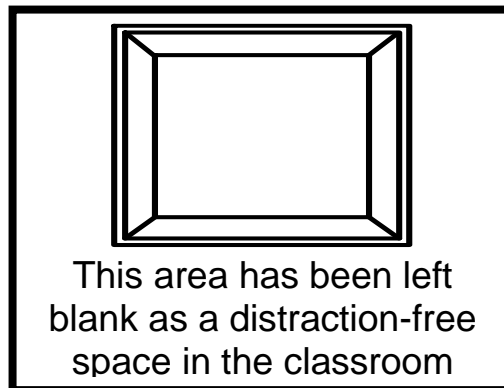
- Rewards and sanctions
- Fire drill
- Dos and don'ts to remember (from the *Welfare, Pastoral & Behaviour Policy*)
- Extra-curricular clubs
- A designated space for 'one-off event' information (e.g. Science Week, World Book Day, Enrichment Week, Carol Service, etc.)



## Classroom organisation

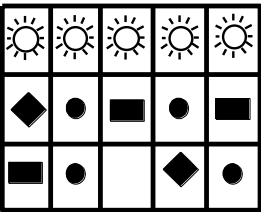


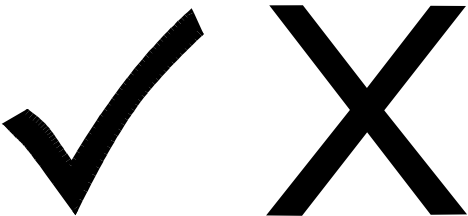
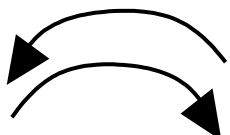
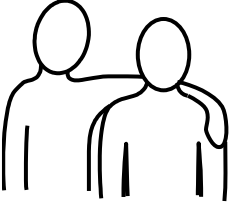
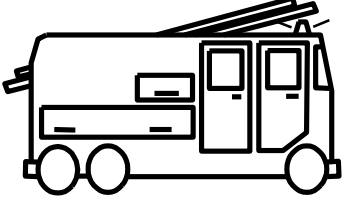
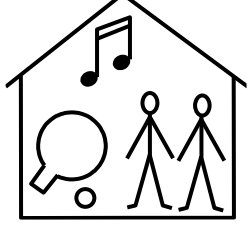
Whilst accepting the importance of teachers making their own personal mark on their classrooms, certain aspects of the organisation of teaching areas has been agreed.

- The display of any materials (posters, pupils' work, information) must be restricted to designated display boards and should remain within the bordered frame
- Blank wall space should remain exactly that – blank wall space – without notices or any other form of documentation fixed to it. This will ensure that clear spaces remain distraction-free both within the classroom and around the school. A small notice is provided for staff to indicate to visitors and others why particular areas have been left blank.



- Extraneous clutter will be removed from tables, desks, the floor and common areas, including the tops of lockers, and the teacher's desk.
- A seating plan will be clear for every class
- Consideration should be given to the need for individual work areas for identified students; this may require screens, or simply seating away from a window or corridor
- Access to common materials should be clearly visible or labelled (e.g. stationery, dictionaries, paper, etc.)

Staff may wish to use the following symbol-supported labels on their noticeboards –

 <p><b>Timetable</b></p>	 <p><b>Rota</b></p>
 <p><b>Rewards &amp; sanctions</b></p>	 <p><b>Dos and Don'ts</b></p>
 <p><b>Changes</b></p>	 <p><b>Safeguarding</b></p>
 <p><b>Fire drill</b></p>	 <p><b>Extra-curricular clubs</b></p>

## 11. The school environment, high arousal areas and the SPELL framework

Part of Chatsworth Schools

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Most practitioners would agree that the physical environment plays a significant role in the effective teaching and learning of most pupils. For pupils on the autism spectrum the impact of the environment is likely to need specific consideration. It is recognised that this is an under researched area however when the overall potential impact of the spectrum is considered the relevance of the environment becomes more apparent. Information processing, perception, cognition and sensory processing are all thought to be significant factors for pupils on the spectrum. All of these aspects will have an impact on how a child or young person interacts with and within a specific environment.

A key principle of inclusive practice is that adjustment should be made to enable the child to access the curriculum, school, home life and their community. The physical environment plays a critical role in this as does the culture and ethos of the school.

*“Environmental supports are materials that assist the individual children, taking into account their sensory needs, their need to understand the passage of time, their modes of learning and strengths, and their need for accurate, reliable information.”*

(Dalrymple, 1995, 244)

Implementing the use of environmental supports need not be complex, they are in fact something most people rely on in new and familiar settings. A degree of individuality will be required however as stated in other sections such adjustments are essential for the child on the spectrum but beneficial to peers.

Evaluating the environment and taking account of potential impact will be important in relation to assessment. Secondary pupils taking award bearing exams may be significantly disadvantaged in certain environments. Jackson (2002) describes his dread of exams being taken in large halls due to being unable to bear the sound of everyone turning pages over. Whilst still poorly understood such sensory sensitivities are frequently reported by children and young people on the spectrum.

The National Autistic Society advocate the use of the SPELL framework (National Autistic Society, 2008). The acronym stands for:

**S**tructure  
**P**ositive approaches  
**E**mpathy  
**L**ow Arousal  
**L**inks

Each area is related to a set of indicators and outcomes. The framework is based on the view that people with autism benefit from structure which helps them to anticipate routines of the day, from positive approaches which are based on respect and are put into place by practitioners who can empathise with how it is to be on the spectrum. Environments that are not over-stimulating are also believed to be helpful especially in relation to sensory issues. Finally SPELL recognises the need for working together in the interests of the person with ASC. Specific training in developing and applying the framework is available via the National Autistic Society.

Dalrymple (1995) offers a more individualised approach to evaluating the environment and suggests that for a pupil on the spectrum teachers will need to take account of a range of aspects including: communication; sensitivity to change; dependency on cues; awareness of time and the passing of time, and sensory needs.

## Part of Chatsworth Schools

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It may be necessary to make adaptations to general areas of the school environment, or at least try to view them from the perspective of a child on the autistic spectrum, individual schools will vary, but common areas which can be challenging are:

- Playground
- Cafeteria
- Gym hall/assembly hall
- Computer suite
- Cloakrooms
- Structured play area
- Moving around school/corridors/between classrooms or buildings
- Arriving at or leaving school

When necessary it is just as important that there are clear structures and expectations. It is crucial, that all relevant staff are aware of the pupil's potential difficulties and agreed targets or strategies, including visual supports, to be implemented in these areas, e.g. catering and janitorial staff, office staff, support assistants, other teachers who do not work directly with the pupil.

These areas of school are generally unstructured and taking part in the playground or cafeteria, for example, will require a high level of interaction with peers and or adults, creating the most likely situation for things to break down for pupils on the autistic spectrum. Arrangements can be simple, such as:

- Allowing children to enter areas such as the cloakroom or lunch hall slightly early, before they become overwhelming.
- Allowing time to observe drama or gym activities before participating provides a mental model of what might be expected.
- Alternative supported activities at lunch time e.g. computer club can channel social activity, this can be especially helpful if there is a link to special interests.
- Rehearsing or practising moving around the school independently can minimise stress.

Some may have concerns about taking time away from formal curricular activities, however, if these areas of learning need are incorporated into Individualised Educational Programmes (IEPs) they open up learning and are legitimate and important activities to allow pupils to access their learning environment fully.

**At Riverston School**, certain environmental adaptations and considerations have been made for pupils with ASC including:

## Part of Chatsworth Schools

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- PE changing rooms – development of individual changing cubicles on both boys’ and girls’ changing facilities
- Visual timetables
- Use of visual support strategies – within classrooms and throughout the school
- Foyer slides – scrolling information providing permanent and visual reminders of daily activities and expectations
- Predictable routines
- Accustomed warnings to changes to the predictable routine
- No bells
- Quiet spaces
- Structured ‘unstructured times’ such as lunchtime including extra-curricular clubs and inter-House sports competitions
- Individually-tailored lunches

## **12. Review**

In line with school policy, and to ensure that policy and practice remains current and relevant, this policy will be review on an annual basis.