

Southfield School Autism Policy

This Policy document sets out the aims, principles and strategies for the education of pupils with an Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) at Southfield School.

Introduction

All pupils at Southfield School have a statement of special educational needs, which will become Education, Health and Care Plans (EHC). A large proportion of our pupils have a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC), the primary characteristics of which are as follows:

Difficulties in:

- non-verbal and verbal communication
- social understanding and social behaviour
- thinking and behaving flexibly (rigidity of thought)
- sensory perception and responses

Pupils with ASC are supported by staff members across the school. All staff have received basic training in supporting pupils with ASC, so awareness is spread across the school. The school have created a bespoke package of training for staff with input from a range of external professionals including, Occupational Therapists, Speech and Language Therapists, Educational Psychologists and staff from the Autism Advisory Service. Whilst some staff members have received further training in specific areas such as TEACCH, PECs, Makaton and Elklan. These staff members are spread across the school and expertise can be found in each of the four departments. Structure, visual support and individualised strategies appropriate for each individual are provided to aid a pupil's access to the curriculum.

Pupils with ASC may also experience sensory processing difficulties, resulting in unusual sensitivity to sensory input. We have 5 familiar senses that respond to sensory input from outside of our body:

- ▶ Auditory (sound) -Information through the ears
- ▶ Gustatory (taste) -Information through the mouth
- ▶ Olfactory (smell) -Information through the nose
- ▶ Visual-(seeing) -Information through the eyes
- ▶ Tactile (touch) -Information through the hands & skin

In order to ensure that pupils on the autistic spectrum are able to access the broad, balanced and relevant curriculum offered throughout the school these additional difficulties characteristic of pupils on the autistic spectrum need to be taken into account. Sensory circuits and sensory diets are implemented for individuals with ASC.

Reference to 'a spectrum' of difficulties is made because there is a wide variation of difficulties and needs within the condition and as a child grows and develops these may change. Therefore this needs to be acknowledged and addressed appropriately during their time in school.

Rationale

In order to meet the needs of all pupils across the spectrum at Southfield , we use an extensive range of established and researched approaches and interventions; drawing on best practice and continuously monitoring and evaluating their use. Our child centred approach, with emphasis on personalised learning, addresses the specific needs of each individual child. Autism Spectrum Condition affects communication, social understanding, and flexibility in thinking and behaviour. This is known commonly as the 'Triad of Impairments':

1. Impairment in social relationships/skills/interaction:

- _ lack of understanding others feelings & emotions
- _ very poor at interpreting other people's facial expressions and body language
- _ individuals may appear aloof, stilted, rude, aggressive, forthright, shy, thoughtless, immature &/or act inappropriately in social interaction situations and consequently fail to form 'real' lasting friendships

2. Impaired Imagination: is an inability to imagine things, which have not already been experienced, for example:

- _ New or different situations can be unimaginable and therefore perhaps frightening.

- _ Changes in routine are frightening / disorientating without the ability to imagine an alternative order of events.
- _ Do not realize/comprehend other peoples mental states are different from their own. An autistic person may not appreciate that other people have their own thoughts, perspectives, plans etc.
- _ Have difficulties with generalizations.

3. Communication and Language. Autistic people have trouble with expressing and projecting themselves and difficulty understanding all levels of communication, which may manifest as:

- _ A literal understanding of language. 'Pictorial language' can be nonsensical. For example, it's raining cats and dogs, we're going '*down*' the road to the shops, get your skates on or we'll be late etc.
- _ "Don't do that". An autistic person may not know what the word '*that*' is referring to.
- _ People with autism have the same emotions as everybody else - but may not express them in a way that is easily understood, partly because they may fail to realize that language is one way of doing this.
- _ They may talk to somebody without taking any notice of that person.

In order to ensure that pupils on the autistic spectrum are able to access the broad, balanced and relevant curriculum offered to pupils throughout our school their additional difficulties and characteristics are taken into account in all aspects of their school life, including the school environment, planning, teaching and learning objectives.

The emphasis is on communication, social interaction, and the independence and emotional wellbeing of the individual pupil.

Pupils with an autistic spectrum condition are integrated in to generic class groups. The School is organised in to four areas; Early Years, Key Stage 1, Lower Key Stage 2 and Upper Key Stage 2. We have eight classes with up to nine children in each. In order to meet the individual needs of each pupil we follow a paired class structure where children are placed in pastoral groups for morning and afternoon registration. The two classes in each area then split in to smaller groups for lessons, the number of groups varies in each area as it is based on individual need, which is assessed and agreed on entry to school or at Annual / Interim Review. The children are grouped based on ability and on the severity of their Autism. Pupils may move from one group to another during their time at school, this is dependent on their changing needs and current assessments.

Also different pupils require different levels of support. Some ASC children thrive when tasks are modelled in 1:1 situations whilst others work best when working with a partner or in a small group situation. Staff- pupil ratios are evaluated on an individual basis and staff are managed flexibly within each area.

Many pupils are easily distracted by what they hear, see, feel or smell. We need to recognise that pupils display varying degrees of tolerance of visual and auditory stimuli and adapt these according to the individual pupils. We provide calm classroom environments, which also have additional 'quiet' areas where pupils may take themselves when their levels of anxiety become raised. Pupils may need a work area or work station which faces away from many visual or auditory distractions (individualised learning) for **some** activities. In addition we have two safe spaces that children can choose to go to.

We therefore adjust our approach when sensory stimuli are obstacles to learning and gradually work on desensitising the children and teaching them the necessary skills to overcome them. We aim to reduce these barriers to learning and work towards the children spending increasing amounts of time in a more inclusive learning environment. Also, through our fully inclusive ethos we give all children the opportunity to access whole school activities.

Progression

Due to our very personalised approach all 4 classes within our ASC Provision are individualised according to the pupils needs. They vary in environment, approaches and teaching activities.

Our EYFS class is play based and incorporates the 6 areas of learning as well as approaches specifically for ASC pupils.

Curriculum

The school is committed to accessing the National Curriculum for all pupils, particularly in terms of breadth and richness. The school does, however, recognise that pupils on the autistic spectrum have additional difficulties which necessitate the adaptation of the courses of study prescribed in the National Curriculum. This may mean a greater emphasis on certain areas of need for these children e.g. communication, social development

Therefore, all pupils access a full differentiated curriculum delivered in a way that addresses their individual needs. Underpinning all teaching and learning is an emphasis on the development of independence, social interaction, social understanding and social communication. Lessons are planned to facilitate development in these areas but specific teaching, for example in social skills, life skills and sensory desensitization are also included. We provide many 'real life' opportunities, for example, educational visits are used to help reduce rigidity and develop appropriate social skills.

We develop skills through our creative thematic curriculum, which follows a different theme each half term. The curriculum is delivered through a very sensory, hands on approach. Within our fully inclusive approach pupils are encouraged to be involved in a range of exciting experiences to support the topics. These include whole school experiences e.g. The Olympics, visit to Zoo for Lion King topic, drumming.

Approaches and Interventions

At Southfield School we use a child-centred approach which addresses the specific needs of the individual child. We have a range of interventions which take account of the pupils difficulties and seek to minimise them, enabling the pupil to feel calmer and thus more able to learn.

Our eclectic approach includes:

- 1) The development of Speech, Language and communication-Makaton, PECs, Intensive Interaction, Attention Autism, Parent support
- 2) A range of Therapeutic interventions-Music Therapy, Play Therapy, Rebound Therapy, Lego Therapy
- 3) TEACCH
- 4) Behavioural Approaches-Step on, Step up, Roots & Fruits, Individual behaviour plans
- 5) Social Scripts and Stories
- 6) Physical activity-Fine motor intervention
- 7) Sensory approach-Sensory Circuits

1.The development of Speech language and communication

The development of speech and language is a priority at Southfield and therefore we facilitate this by developing staff skills as well as working alongside our two Speech and Language Therapists (Rachel Ryan and Cara Pilcher) and our Speech and Language Therapy Assistant (Sarah Critoph).

We use a range of communication systems with the children. This includes: PECS (Picture exchange system) Makaton signing and intensive interaction. The development of functional and meaningful verbal communication is the long-term aim for all pupils at Southfield School. All pupils are assessed on an individual basis to ascertain the best method or methods to facilitate communication.

PECs (Picture Exchange Communication System)

Pupils who are non-verbal or who have limited use of language are generally taught to use PECs. PECs is a picture based communication system used primarily for requesting wants and needs. Photos, line drawings or more abstract symbols are used depending on the child's achieved level of symbol comprehension. PECs books are used during snack to enable children to make choices and are made available to pupils throughout the school day. PECs is also being linked to other lessons e.g. music, art, literacy and numeracy. The Early Years department run regular PECs intervention sessions.

Makaton

Staff are skilled in using Makaton signing at varying levels of expertise. This is used to support speech and can also be included alongside PECs. Signs of the week are shared in the weekly Headteachers assembly. Makaton is also used within our singing and signing lunchtime club.

Intensive interaction

Intensive interaction is an approach to teaching the pre-speech fundamentals of communication to children who have autism and/or severe learning difficulties who are still at an early stage of communication development. Intensive interaction is used with pupils who have a limited repertoire of positive communicative behaviours. Here, the aims are to develop skills of early social behaviour e.g. turn-taking, contingent action and eventually to the initiation and leading of interactive 'games'. Staff work in conjunction with Speech Therapists to deliver intensive interaction.

Attention Autism

The attention autism approach focuses on developing joint/shared attention and listening skills and giving the children "an irresistible invitation to learn". An attention autism bucket group is a bucket full of motivating and exciting toys and gadgets which will be of high interest to the children. The adult with the bucket demonstrates one toy at a time in front of the children, for example, winding up a toy snake and then watching the snake move. The reward must be intrinsic to the activity – the enjoyment of watching the snake. If a child gets up out of their seat they are gently, non-verbally guided back. This is to encourage attention and listening skills

Parent support

We offer workshops and 'drop in' consultations with the Speech and Language Therapists to support parents with developing communication at home

2. We have a range of practitioners who provide Therapeutic interventions to support communication and behaviour

Speech Therapists & Speech Therapy Assistant

We have two Speech Therapist and a Speech and Language Therapy Assistant, who are employed by Hertfordshire NHS Trust based at the school. One Therapist and the assistant work two days a week and the other Therapist works one day a week.

Occupational Therapist

We employ an Occupational Therapist, one morning a week to work with staff and individuals to implement programmes and identify resources to support sensory processing and fine motor needs.

Music Therapists

We employ two music Therapists, (Jenny & Amy) who each work one day a week. They work with groups and individual children to develop their communication skills

Play Therapists

We employ a Play Therapist one day a week to work with individual children

3. TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication Handicapped Children)

The key principles of TEACCH e.g. structure and visual information, are practised throughout the classes to enable pupils to know what work they will be doing, how much work they will be doing, where they will be working and to inform them of what is coming next. Individual and class timetables are used to support pupils. Aspects of this approach involve the use of minimum distraction work areas which have minimal visual or auditory distractions, where pupils can systematically work on skills.

Implementation of TEACCH varies across the school according to the needs of classes or individuals. Some classrooms are clearly organised along TEACCH principles with individual timetables and workstations. In other classes individuals may use timetables for some elements of their learning e.g. making choices during unstructured times, specific transitions

4. Behavioural Approaches

Behaviour is a means of communication and we endeavour to understand what the child is aiming 'to say' through their behaviour. Specific strategies are used to reduce anxiety and promote feelings of well being.

An applied behaviour analysis approach helps to modify unwanted behaviours and promote more appropriate ones. This stimulus – response – reward programme, which involves the use of strong motivators ensure the child learns basic work behaviour e.g. sitting on a chair. The same principles are used when dealing with behavioural issues. We consistently aim to reinforce positive behaviour and to reinforce positive responses. All staff have a keyring with symbols on their person. These symbols can be instantly shown to children, which supports pupil behaviour e.g. no, stop,

Some pupils have individual behavioural plans that are regularly reviewed and updated. All teachers and teaching assistants are trained in positive handling Step On with a large number of staff also being trained in Step Up.

5. Physical Activity

Physical activity is encouraged within structured PE lessons as well as the opportunity to have regular soft play sessions.

6. Social Stories

These aim to reduce anxiety in unfamiliar situations or when preparing for a certain event. They also inform the child about social expectations and the benefits of conforming to these. Stories are often shared with home and can be written to support the management of behaviour in the home.

7. Sensory Approach

A sensory approach is used to engage pupils in their learning.

Assessment

All pupils are comprehensively assessed using PIVATS on entry to school. Additional assessments are used within EYFS Provision, including the 'Development Matters' guidance. Challenging, but realistic, targets are set with pupils' learning styles and pace of learning in mind. Pupil progress is tracked and recorded each term and assessment outcomes are reported at Annual Review in the form of a school report. IEP targets are set and reviewed regularly, these aim to reduce barriers to learning.

Continuity of Approach

We recognise the importance of generalising the skills that pupils learn both across school and within a range of settings. Class teachers regularly liaise with multi-disciplinary teams, parents and carers to ensure continuity of approaches in and out of school.

Training

PECS & TEACCH

Staff across the school are trained in autism specific practices. SLT, Teachers and Teaching Assistants are selected from each department to attend PECs and TEACCH courses. This is to ensure that there is a spread of expertise across the school.

Supporting Speech, Communication and Language

Speech and Language Therapy provide training, support and modelling of the following interventions for staff across the school; Intensive Interaction, Attention Autism, PECs, Lego Therapy, Colourful Semantics and Makaton.

Elklan

In addition all teachers and a large number of Teaching Assistants have undertaken Elklan training. Elklan is designed to support staff to promote the communication skills of children, with training focused on developing 'Communication Support for Children with Complex Needs.'

Autism Awareness

All staff have attended internal training on autism-awareness, behaviours for learning, preparing the environment and good practice delivered by the Autism Advisory Service and the Educational Psychology Service. School staff are kept up to date with current research relating to the education and well being of pupils with an autistic spectrum condition

Every member of staff will receive training in effective techniques of management of behaviour through 'Hertfordshire Steps'

All staff will become familiar with a range of tools through 'Step On' designed to help them understand behaviour and follow the agreed practices and procedures adopted by the school. 'Step Up' will be offered to all staff after the successful completion of Step On based on audited need.

All training will be refreshed annually as agreed in the protocols for Hertfordshire Steps.

We have high but realistic expectations for all our pupils. We endeavour to provide the very best learning experiences through a personalised approach. To achieve this our Provision for pupils on the autistic spectrum is continuously monitored, evaluated and adapted as part of the self-evaluation process.

