

THE COPPICE ACADEMY

Autism Policy

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Autism Policy

The Coppice Academy is a generic special school.

The Provision

Students with an Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) are included in every class throughout the school.

The primary characteristics of ASC 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.

Students with ASC can be affected by sensitivity to sound, touch, fine and gross motor skills and balance and/or visual stimuli. Reference to 'a spectrum' of difficulties is made because there is a wide variation of difficulties and needs within the Condition and as a young person grows and develops these may change.

The students with ASC are supported by staff members who have specific training in aspects of Autism. In Addition, many members of staff have received basic training in supporting pupils with ASC so awareness is spread across the school. Structure, visual support and individualised strategies appropriate for each individual are provided to aid a student's access to the curriculum.

Rationale

Autism Spectrum Condition affects communication, social understanding, and flexibility in thinking and behaviour. Including restrictive and repetitive patterns of behavior activities and interest (including sensory needs). This is known commonly as the 'Dyad of Impairments' all of which can result in unusual behaviour.

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

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.

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 students on the autistic spectrum are able to access the broad, balanced and relevant curriculum offered to students 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 well being of the individual pupil.

Individual Needs of Pupils with ASC

As with all students at Coppice Academy those on the spectrum have a Student Passport. It will reflect their personal needs against the Dyad of Impairments and be reviewed termly.

Communication

Communication is fundamental to learning and therefore seen as a key area of development for all students. The school approaches this by providing a 'total communication environment', using sign-supported speech and symbols, as well as photographs and objects of reference if necessary, to provide clear and reinforced communication.

If appropriate, students will access one to one intensive interaction, where staff will encourage pupils to respond to sounds in conversation like exchanges, which may lead to copying of words and phrases. Staff will also encourage turn taking exchanges within group situations. Individual communication books may be developed alongside the visual timetables to aid the pupil's communicative intent where necessary. The Speech and Language Therapists will develop this system along with the teachers, teaching assistants and support staff.

Approaches to Teaching Pupils with ASC

A visually structured approach is used to ensure that students understand what is expected of them, and to enable them to anticipate what comes next. This involves the use of visual timetables, and a structured environment plus consistency of approach.

There are direct 1:1 teaching times for the learning of new skills, as well as times when pupils are encouraged to work independently, or in a group with adult guidance. Regular physical exercise is incorporated into the daily timetable to develop gross motor skills/balance and to help channel any excess energy that may cause anxiety.

Life skills are an important part of the student's programmes, including community based education. Independence and emotional development of the pupils is highlighted in the PSHE element of the curriculum. If appropriate social stories are used to model social behavior and developed confidence in social situations

Sensory Issues

Some pupils with an autistic spectrum condition have specific sensory difficulties which can result in unusual or uncomfortable perception of one or more of the following: sound, sense, touch, sight, balance, motor movements and smell. They may become upset, distracted or react in an aggressive manner due to the discomfort or pain they feel.

We therefore try to reduce environmental anxiety and distress by providing the following:

- An environment which is calm and comfortable with few distractions
- An environment with clear structures and routines
- The knowledge that they can ask for help and it will be provided
- Specific sensory support to match their needs, to help them learn

Training

It is part of the role of the Autism team to provide In-service training (CPD) and advice on ASC for members of the school staff. The County Adviser (Autism Outreach) for Autism and a Senior Educational Psychologist, a specialist in Autism, supports the team.

Training will provide an overview of published approaches, Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), Intensive Interaction and discussions on how these are adapted and used within the school.

Partnership with parents

Parents are regarded as essential partners in helping their children to learn. A progress report is sent home every term as well as parents evening and open forums. Phone call home and if appropriate meetings with multi-disciplinary agencies are encouraged to keep open dialogue about health care and social needs

Management and Monitoring

The ASC team meet each term to discuss strategies and issues. Extra input from the advisor and individual observations can be arranged.

Provision for students on the autistic spectrum is regularly monitored and evaluated as part of the school's self-evaluation process.

ASC Curriculum

The ASC Curriculum planning has identified subject areas which create low arousal spaces for an integrated graduated controlled time in order to create the greatest possible outcomes for concentration and learning in the classroom. The timetable allows for flexibility in the Curriculum and movement, creating opportunities for the students to have access to core subjects as well as motivating them by focusing on areas of interest.

The ASC Curriculum allows students to thrive, immersing them in an educational pathway that will allow them to explore their interests and to underpin and embed learning in core subjects as well using it as a vehicle to improve social, emotional well-being communication and interaction. Offering students the tools to become more socially responsible for their actions and allowing them to explore ways of empathising and understanding their peers. The Curriculum encourages and supports more flexible thought and challenges fixated patterned thinking and movement. Core subjects are embedded across the Curriculum in other subjects, giving the students greater autonomy to explore the learning criteria presented in the core subject strands.

The ASC curriculum currently focuses on life skills adopting the OCR life and living pathways and accredited units. Life and Living Skills is a comprehensive range of versatile and adaptable qualifications, with no minimum entry requirements. There are no mandatory units or barred combinations at any level, allowing for varied personalised learning programmes with a completely flexible structure.