The Southfield Trust

Autism Policy

Principles

Autism is a pervasive, developmental disorder; difficulties experienced by those diagnosed with autism can vary in severity. Current estimates state that more than 1 in every 100 children now receives a formal diagnosis of autism. From the perspective of the Trust, this has meant that the numbers of pupils/students attending the school who are diagnosed with autism has risen and may well continue to rise in the foreseeable future. In the academic year 2015-2016, approximately 60% of pupils/students have a formal diagnosis of autism in the Trust.

The Trust aims to meet the needs of its pupils/students with autism by:

- working in partnership with parents/carers and other agencies to share good practice
- offering a variety of consistent, high quality provision for autistic pupils
- providing well planned, smooth transitions between environments
- ensuring that staff have access to CPD and support
- delivering a broad curriculum which balances personal, social and academic needs

The Trust aims to ensure that all pupils/students with autism become:

- happy and engaged
- independent, confident, life-long learners
- proud of their achievements
- effective contributors to their community
- well prepared for their adult life

All staff working within the Trust recognise that pupils with autism will have the following needs:

Needs	Examples of how these difficulties manifest
Communication	All areas of expressive & receptive language: semantics, pragmatics, syntax, inability to express and/or understand can lead to frustration, anxiety & challenging behaviour, inhibits ability to access all areas of the curriculum without support, resulting in compromised progress
Social Interaction	Poor: proximity awareness, reciprocity & self/other-awareness, difficulty reading and using body language; inaccurate perceptions of others' behaviour; establishing and maintaining friendships can be hard
Flexibility / Social Imagination	Poor ability to imagine what may happen, inability to move from the familiar to the unfamiliar, transitions between activities and environments, reluctance to participate in a broad range of activities; difficulty engaging with unfamiliar people
Central Coherence	Difficulty understanding the big picture, connecting and generalising knowledge, difficulty transferring skills and knowledge across activities, subjects and environments
Executive Dysfunction	Inability to devise a serial approach, poor planning, difficulty completing tasks involving several steps & sequencing information
Sensory Processing / Integration	Difficulty filtering, channelling and prioritising stream of sensory input, poor attention and focus, over/under stimulation, distractible, unable to tolerate certain sensory input e.g. feel of the PE hall floor on feet etc., low engagement
Motor skills	Fine and/or gross motor skills affected e.g. handwriting, dressing/undressing, PE
Theory of Mind	Inability to understand other people's thinking or viewpoints, may misinterpret other people's intentions, states the obvious: little access to shared knowledge; actions may be misinterpreted e.g. close proximity for aggression
Caetextia	Difficulty understanding and adapting to different social and environmental contexts, inability to read social cues e.g. the difference between expected behaviour in the hall for PE compared to assembly & lunchtimes

Provision

In order to meet the needs associated with autism, all staff working within our Trust understand that pupils with autism need access to a range of enhanced provision. School staff deliver the following provision for all pupils with autism:

Social Imagination: support to develop social imagination and/or flexibility of thought to enables pupils to adapt to different environments and generalise their learning -

- Structured approach: pupils are aware of expectations and are supported to predict what is happening next
- All transitions are planned and, unless an emergency, pupils have warning to transition from one activity to the next.
- Consequences are taught within a nurturing environment e.g. the use of planned sabotage
- Pupils have opportunities to broaden their range of experiences inside and outside of school

Social Communication: improving pupils/students social communication by teaching the skills required to understand and use necessary social conventions -

- Greetings may be taught and practised in context; social communication group sessions should be relevant to the learning needs of pupils/students e.g. 'Hello' sessions should only be used when this particular skill needs to be taught
- There are opportunities to practice social communication thought out the day both in formal lessons and outside of class
- Staff model and encourage appropriate social communication e.g. during lunchtimes

Social Interaction: learning these skills will mean that pupils can engage in meaningful interactions with others in relation to meeting their more immediate needs and developing longer term relationships:

- The necessary social skills required for different environments/activities are identified, then taught e.g. through ILPs
- Teaching staff plan for the progression of social skills as pupils move through the Trust
- Opportunities are provided to practice social interaction thought out the day in a range of settings

Sensory Needs: developing strategies to overcome a variety of sensory needs will mean that pupils/students can better process the stream of information from their environment -

- Teaching staff use sensory profiles to establish the extent of sensory needs
- If identified in sensory profiles, basic classroom strategies are implemented to address initial sensory difficulties e.g. ear defenders, sensory boxes
- For pupils presenting with complex or challenging sensory needs, staff then liaise with the OT service

Promoting Positive Behaviour: our pupils/students benefit from a positive approach to behaviour so that they can develop behaviour for learning -

- Our understanding of autism, and the impact of autism on individuals, is at the heart of promoting positive behaviour
- Behaviour is interpreted as a form of communication
- Challenging behaviour is understood as behaviour that poses a significant risk and/or challenges, or obstructs, pupils' ability to fully engage in wider society
- There is an emphasis on supporting behaviour to change and improve rather than an over reliance on sanctions
- An ethos of preventing behavioural incidents and quick de-escalation is evident across the Trust
- Interventions, including the use of physical interventions, are planned by staff and agreed with parents and form part of behaviour support plans
- For autistic pupils, there is explicit reference to autism in behaviour support plans

Learning Environment: we recognise the importance of designing all of our environments to maximise opportunities for learning -

- Where necessary, classrooms have distinct areas which are associated with different activities e.g. independent work or group sessions
- Classrooms are well organised and clutter free
- Social traffic e.g. seating is considered and adaptations are made accordingly

Notice and Display Boards: consideration is given to displays to ensure that there is access to necessary information without presenting an overwhelming amount of visual stimulus -

- Apart from essential safety information, displays should support pupils' learning
- Displays are contained within a designated area
- Personal information is not publicly displayed
- Backing paper and/or display borders should not distract from the material displayed
- Labels & titles should be accessible to pupils e.g. supported by symbols
- Staff carry out regular 'visual audits' to make sure that visuals stay relevant

Visual Support: pupils/students with autism often benefit from visual support to supplement verbal language and assist with organisational skills

- The extent of symbol support used in an environment should support reflect the understanding and visual processing ability of pupils
- Visual support is deployed according to the following hierarchy: concrete objects
  clear photo (one object)
  photo and symbol
  symbol
  symbol and writing
  written material

- moving through the above phases should be carefully managed and based on an assessment of skills/needs so that pupils have access to the right level of visual support
- The type of visual support used in classrooms is appropriate to individuals; for some pupils, written lists will suffice
- The understanding of visual representations, e.g. symbols, should be taught, practiced, reinforced and developed over time. This development will include the introduction of alterative visuals to gradually broaden pupils' flexibility

Timetables: timetables are used to clearly communicate expectations of the day; these clear expectations should increase predictability facilitate preparation for the school day and therefore reduce anxiety -

- All pupils/students have access to differentiated timetables
- It is envisaged that pupils' use of and understanding of timetables will progress with age
- Timetables are used to teach flexibility e.g. pupils will progress from accessing now/next to a set of symbols representing a sequence of events over a longer period of time
- All timetables that are displayed are accessible to pupils and referred to throughout the day

Lesson Organisation: all lessons are delivered with some degree of structure -

- Lessons are organised with a clear beginning, middle, end
- Resources that are immediately available should be relevant for each lesson
- As part of the lesson structure, pupils should be taught to tidy away the resources that they have used and then learn to gather their own resources for each session
- Where necessary, there should be preparation for micro-transitions within activities e.g. using the 'traffic light' approach to signify nearly finished
- There should be opportunities for pupils to work independently as well as work within a group
- Plenaries, reflection time or assessment for learning should be included within each lesson and matched to the abilities of the pupils
- Some pupils/students access learning through partial participation: they may observe others or contribute to a group from a distance

Differentiated activities: lessons are differentiated according to the social, communication and academic needs of each pupil/student -

- Teaching staff use a variety of techniques to differentiate activities including:
  Motivating resources
  Incorporating pupils' specific interests
  Understanding levels of engagement
  Academic and social challenges carefully matched with pupils' understanding

Educational Visits: Educational visits are recognised as a vital part of the learning process for pupils with autism -

- There should be planned progression for skills taught during educational visits
- Opportunities to generalise skills in a wider environment are a major component
- Flexibility of thought should be developed by broadening pupils' experiences

Links

We have strong links with the National Autistic Society (NAS) and we have achieved NAS Autism Accreditation. This accreditation is reviewed every three years and the next review is due in November 2013. We adhere to NAS guidelines and our Senior Leadership Team conduct learning walks to ensure that we continue to provide an autism friendly environment.

This policy has been written to supplement other policies in the Trust and should be considered alongside the existing policies and documents already in place particularly each school's Autism Handbook, communication policy, and the Trust transition policy.