

Policy for the Education of Pupils with Autism

Mission statement

We are committed to supporting young people with autism and their families to overcome the barriers that autism can create. We want to enable our pupils to lead calm, purposeful lives in which they have as much autonomy and independence as possible.

Aims

1. To support pupils with autism to learn effective and functional communication
2. To support pupils with autism to develop meaningful relationships
3. To support pupils with autism to engage meaningfully with the community
4. To provide autism specific knowledge and skills to parents and carers of pupils with autism.

How these are achieved

1. Staff roles and responsibilities

The autism team comprises of the Head teacher who has a Master's degree in autism, a teacher with 5 years' experience working with pupils who have severe autism and two full time teaching assistants who are both highly trained and experienced. One of these teaching assistants is also the school's parent support worker.

2. Staff and parent training

We give immediate induction training and then ongoing training to all staff to support them to understand and be able to support pupils with autism.

Please see our induction and training policy and practical documents.

They support the following essential knowledge and understanding: There are fundamental neurological differences between the brains of people who have autism and those who are neuro typical. In the case of the pupils who are at our school, the effects of these differences can cause severe barriers to basic functioning, mental good health and emotional well-being.

We understand that because of neurological differences, our pupils with autism have difficulties in the following areas:

- **Social Communication** - they do not naturally learn or understand how to communicate through conventional social means and find social communication linked to emotions confusing and stressful.
- **Social understanding and emotional regulation.** Our pupils with autism struggle fundamentally with the concept of shared attention. They do not share the need to please others or conform to social rules and conventions. They do not share the emotions of others easily and may become overwhelmed and frightened by their own emotions or those of people around them.
- **Thought and behaviour-** They do not have flexible thought processes and become rigid in their approach to life, becoming stressed when things are different or there is a change to their routine. This can lead to them becoming overwhelmed by obsession and compulsion.
- **Sensory processing** Sensory information is not easily processed or filtered by people with autism. Loud, bright, chaotic environments can easily cause them to become unwell which leads to them being unable to function and being forced to hurt others

or themselves.

3. Planning

The Autism team, class teachers and relevant therapists work together to design bespoke programmes for our pupils with autism. We use the SCERTS (social communication, emotional regulation and trans active support). This is a highly researched and respected autism package which is based in up to date neurological thinking. Each pupil's progress is charted via the pupil progress and case study system which makes reference to each intervention they receive and the impact it is having. We believe in quality conversation which this system places formally in the foreground of our practice. *Please see our assessment and reporting policy.*

4. Environment

We strive to design and maintain a supportive, calm, quiet environment for all pupils. We make alterations and adaptations to our environment to support successful learning and we have four quiet learning areas which we use for pupils to access when they cannot cope in the main classrooms. We are also committed to helping pupils with autism to overcome their difficulties and learn to understand themselves well enough to be able to use learnt strategies for dealing with community environments. *Please see our practical support documents regarding environment.*

5. Approaches and Teaching Strategies

Lakeside follows the advice of the Local Authority in taking an eclectic approach to the teaching strategies employed. It is important that strategies used are tailored to the particular needs of the child.

SCERTS forms an 'umbrella' model for supporting our young people to learn and our staff to teach them. It covers and promotes all of the below strategies and therapies. SCERTS promotes the development of what we believe to be the key skills required by people with autism through training and developing the staff to facilitate these skills.

Communication

We believe that relationships are the bedrock for our achievements and to this end, our pupils with autism are taught strategies for accessing and forming relationships from the time they enter school. We use intensive interaction with all our pupils as we know contingent response is a well-researched and highly effective way of engaging them, teaching them the fundamentals of communication between two people and supporting them to trust us. *Please see our practical support documents related communication and to intensive interaction.*

We find out what our pupils like to do and offer opportunities for them to engage in these activities regularly throughout the day.

We support pupils to begin to ask us for what they want through the use of 'Picture Exchange Communication Systems' and then develop these slowly and carefully to teach pupils to comment upon their world and to learn about themselves and their own emotions. This approach is highly structured and supports the development of language and speech. Lakeside uses total communication; sign, visual support, environmental clues etc. *please see our practical support documents regarding communication.*

We continue to promote speech and functional spoken language through colour coded sentence building and promoting the importance of people over objects in the minds of pupils with autism.

Flexible thought, emotional regulation, behaviour and social learning

We use methods advocated through the TEACCH system (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped Children) because we know it is well researched and thus effective. TEACCH advocates the use of clear, visual supportive strategies to help the pupil to cope with and overcome the anxieties caused by their autism.

These include:

Visual timetables - these are designed to support the pupil at their stage of development.

Pupils need this at all times as we know they are visual learners. We strive to make it meaningful and functional. Pupils may have a mixture of photographs and symbols according to what is relevant and meaningful to them and symbols used may be coloured or black and white based on our agreed assessment of future need and development.

Social Stories - these are designed to explain situations to pupils which can be confusing or stressful in a visual way. In our setting, they should be as simple and visually clear as possible and may even look more like a schedule or list of rules for the pupil to follow. Again the design is based upon assessment of understanding.

Structured teaching at work stations - Each pupil with autism will have access to an individual, clear, low distraction work area. Pupils will be taught new skills and concepts in this area and then supported to transfer these to less structured environments. We strive to reduce social challenge when we are teaching new skills and concepts and then increase as these are committed to deep learning by our pupils.

Use of non-directive approaches and controlled environments

Many of our pupils are not ready to access highly varied structure, they need simple, clear environments and a non-verbal approach to their teaching. We use techniques promoted through the work of Carol Dweck, Nancy Kline, Alfie Kohn and the Bamboozle Theatre Company the latter of whom were our guides and mentors through this thinking. We use principles of indicating equality, non-directive offer, mirroring, detaching from outcome, starting where the pupil is and design of controlled environment. Please see our booklet on use of Bamboozle techniques.

Sensory processing and calm alert learning

As stated above we make adaptations to the environment in order to support pupils to attain a calm alert state. We assess their sensory needs using a sensory profile and plan sensory diets accordingly. We believe in teaching pupils to understand their autism as much as possible and be able to use strategies in order to remain calm and alert to allow them to access the places and activities they like and can progress in. *Please see our practical documents related to sensory processing.*

Support for pupils to overcome challenges which affect behavior

Autism may cause behavioural challenges which severely affect the young person and those around them. We are committed to supporting pupils to learn to overcome these challenges and adapt their environment to allow them to do this. We use the 'Hertfordshire Steps' a

challenging behaviour prevention, support and management package. We have shared beliefs and a consistent approach which is rooted in understanding reasons for behaviours and promoting the learning of functional and therapeutic strategies.

Resourcing

The autism team monitor and support the purchase of any new resources. There is designated budget for pupils with autism. We have employed a parent to keep symbols up to date for visual support and picture exchange. We believe that this is often our most important resource and thus have invested in its upkeep and maintenance.

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