



## 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, happy 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, An Assistant Head teacher with an NPQ in Leading Behaviour and Culture, with 10 years' experience working with Autism. A teacher with 6 years' experience working with pupils who have severe autism and three full time teaching assistants who are all 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 transactive 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.*

### **Child-Initiated Learning and Pupil Motivators**

We recognise that meaningful progress for pupils with autism is most successful when it is rooted in the child's own interests and intrinsic motivations. Staff consistently observe and identify what each pupil finds motivating, whether sensory, activity-based, or relational, and use these motivators to structure learning opportunities throughout the day. Child-initiated learning enables pupils to engage with activities at their own pace and from a position of emotional safety, supporting the development of communication, flexible thought, and shared attention. By following the pupil's lead, we ensure that teaching is responsive, relevant, and deeply personalised. This approach promotes autonomy, reduces anxiety, and strengthens the trusting relationships that underpin all successful learning for our pupils.

### **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** - We assess and identify which pupils learn most effectively through highly structured, task-based approaches. For these pupils, we provide access to an individual, clear, low-distraction work area where learning tasks are presented in a visually organised and predictable way. New skills and concepts are introduced within this structured environment to reduce cognitive and social demands, enabling pupils to focus and succeed. As pupils become secure and confident in these skills, we support them to transfer their learning to less structured and more socially demanding environments. We strive to reduce social challenge when teaching new concepts, gradually increasing this as learning becomes embedded and pupils are ready for deeper application.

**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.*

### **Pupil Voice and Autonomy**

We are committed to promoting the autonomy of our pupils with autism and ensuring that their preferences, choices, and emotional needs are understood and respected. Many of our pupils communicate their voice through non-verbal means, and staff are trained to recognise subtle signals, patterns of behaviour, sensory responses, and emerging communication to ensure each pupil's voice is acknowledged. We actively create opportunities for pupils to make choices, initiate activities, and influence their daily routines in ways that are meaningful and accessible to them. By supporting pupils to understand themselves and express their needs safely, we empower them to develop a sense of control and agency in their lives. This approach strengthens emotional regulation, builds trust, and underpins our belief that every pupil has the right to be heard and to participate in decisions that affect them.

### **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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