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Good Autism Practice Report: Case Studies

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Case Study A: Watermore Primary School

Type of school	Mainstream primary school
School website	www.watermoreprimary.org.uk
Number on roll	320
Age range	4 to 11 years
Focus of the case study	Strategies to support the inclusion of an 8-year old autistic pupil with significant anxiety
Principles illustrated	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understanding the strengths, interests and challenges of the autistic child and young person2. Enabling the voice of the autistic child and young person to contribute to and influence decisions3. Collaboration with parents and carers of autistic children and young people4. Workforce development to support autistic children and young people5. Leadership and management that promotes and embeds good autism practice6. An ethos and environment that fosters social inclusion for children and young people on the autism spectrum8. Adapting the curriculum, teaching and learning to promote wellbeing and success for autistic

Context

In reception, Tom (fictitious name) found it difficult to settle into school. He appeared to be extremely anxious and his behaviour was challenging for staff. He hit other children, threw construction bricks at a teacher and told the headteacher to 'shut up'. Tom was perceived as intimidating by his peers as he was very assertive in his play. He struggled with turn-taking, sharing and being able to wait. He ran away from staff frequently when he was not able to cope with the situation. Tom was also very sensitive to noise and movement. He was very self-critical and often blamed himself when things went wrong. He was not sleeping well and sleep deprivation made him less able to cope at school.

Actions taken and impact

With support from the local authority autism adviser, staff explored the likely causes of Tom's anxiety and how this might be reduced. Together they implemented strategies across the school and these reduced Tom's anxiety. Tom is now more able to do things for himself



(e.g. hanging up his coat and putting his bag away). He has been able to build more positive friendships with peers. Other children now approach him to play and he has become very popular because he is bright, funny and imaginative. He has play-dates now and is hoping to re-join Beavers. Other parents have seen and heard from their own children that Tom is calmer and less anxious.

This case study illustrates a number of the strategies that were successfully implemented to support Tom and to reduce his anxiety.

Understanding the individual with autism

P1 – Understanding the strengths, interests and challenges of the autistic child and young person

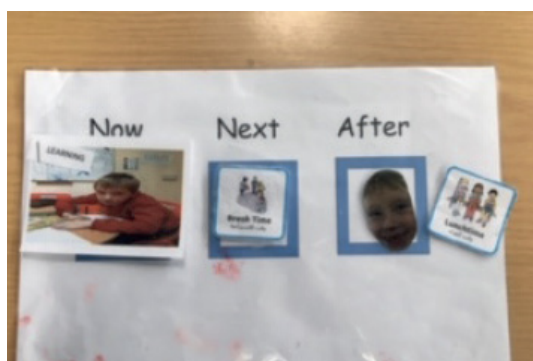
An assessment of Tom's sensory needs was completed using the AET Sensory Checklist. Actions were taken to address the issues raised. These included:

- giving Tom the opportunity to move as much as possible – Tom enjoyed climbing, running and swinging
- carrying out deep pressure activities such as squeezing activities and deep hugs (with parental permission)
- use of weighted items such as neck and lap weights
- provision of sensory sessions that included alerting, organising and calming activities
- helping to maintain Tom's focus with fidget toys.

Some sensory activities are used daily to help calm Tom, (e.g. washing his hands with soap). He enjoys hugs, cuddles, back rubs, listening to a story and singing. These are mostly private activities but he will accept back rubs in class.



Staff developed an anxiety scale which they used to show Tom how anxious they felt he was. This used a Lego figure as Lego is one of his interests. The intention was that eventually Tom could use this to judge his own anxiety levels and this is beginning to develop.



Tom uses a 'now and next' board to set clear expectations of what is going to happen.

The class environment was busy, loud and bright so Tom needed regular breaks. He has breaks away from the classroom eight times a day including break and lunch times. At these times, he may go on a listening walk outside, play football in the hall, draw, or bake.



Tom was very good at using the iPad and this was sometimes used as an incentive. The whole class use iPads for *Maths Rockstars Times Tables* <https://trockstars.com> and he enjoys this. Using the iPad also reduces anxiety for Tom (e.g. he enjoys playing games and these can be used as a 'bridge' to the next activity).

The computer is used in English and for written project work as Tom gets anxious about handwriting. Any writing activity is chunked with breaks and although he gets distracted, he can engage with the work well.

Tom was also interested in making things for the class. Staff capitalised on this interest and created opportunities to do this. This supported Tom to build relationships with his peers. He enjoys baking once a fortnight and shares the cakes and biscuits he makes with the class. He grew tomatoes last year and offered them to the class and made a birdfeeder.

Tom's parents have arranged private swimming lessons outside school and he goes horse riding. These activities provide structure and offer therapeutic benefits.

P2 – Enabling the voice of the autistic child and young person to contribute to and influence decisions

In the classroom, Tom does not have to sit on the carpet for story and discussion time. He can sit at a table at the back of the class.

Pupil choice and voice is promoted through the language used by all the staff. For example, the TA working with Tom always uses question stems which promote choice, such as:

- “Would you ...?”
- “Can you ...?”
- “May we ...?”
- “Would you like to ...?”
- “How do you feel about this?”.

The number of choices Tom is given is limited to two as he finds too much choice overwhelming.

This is consistently applied and extends to motivators and incentives (e.g. the TA might say “You've earned your reward, would you like play dough or drawing?”).

Tom has structured lunchtimes following a 20:20:20 model (20 minutes lunch, 20 minutes free time, 20 minutes social time). He chooses a friend to have lunch with and sits away from the crowds.



Positive and effective relationships

P3 – Collaboration with parents and carers of autistic children and young people

Supporting Tom at school involved regular meetings, telephone calls and emails with his parents. His parents were partners in the process, suggesting ideas to help Tom and using ideas from school at home (e.g. the sensory calming strategies were used just before bedtime to reduce his anxiety and enable him to fall asleep more quickly).

P4 – Workforce development to support autistic children and young people

All staff at the school developed a consistent approach and remain calm and quiet when working with Tom. They use negotiation when introducing activities. Requests are made carefully by making suggestions rather than demands, using language such as, “I wonder if we could ...?”, “How about if we ...?”, “I’m looking for someone to help me ...”. This is detailed further in the next section.

Enabling environments

P5 – Leadership and management promotes and embeds good autism practice

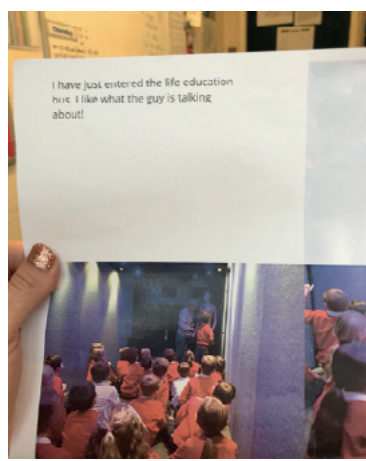
There is an embedded, whole-school approach to support for Tom. Leaders have invested in training to ensure that a consistent approach is used. When Tom is anxious, staff:

- use no direct demands in their language (e.g. Would you ...?, Could you ...?, I am going to ... and Would you like to ...?)
- repeating the now, next visual, verbally, sometimes helps
- speaking to another child to give instructions but knowing that Tom is listening and using a low voice and humour.

They developed their own staff communication routines to manage situations. Staff would ask each other, “Do you need a cup of tea?” If the staff member replied, “No”, it meant all was well and they were fine. If they replied, “Yes please”, it meant “I am OK but keep an eye on the situation”, and if they replied, “Yes, with sugar” it meant “I need someone to take over for a short while”. This helped enormously, even if only for 5 minutes.

Staff are trained in TEAM TEACH (developed by George Matthews) to guide Tom from the classroom to a safe place, when needed. They have also completed the AET training Tiers 1 and 2 along with whole staff training around working with anxious autistic pupils. Staff have also had training on sensory issues, working closely with an OT. The local authority adviser gave whole school training on sensory integration and helped the staff devise a personalised sensory plan for Tom. The OT added her expertise by suggesting further activities.

Support for Tom is viewed as a whole school issue by the Senior Leadership Team. The whole staff team has a ‘can do’ attitude. The Headteacher’s philosophy is that “It needs a village to raise a child”.



Tom needed extra support for transitions. The TA would drip feed information to Tom about changes ahead. She used pre-teaching and encouraged Tom to look at the timetable every day. If appropriate, Social Stories are used (Gray, 2015). Tom relates well to Social Stories and will write his own which do not follow Carol Gray's suggested formula but work for him.

Staff made sure they were a step ahead, where possible, and there was frequent liaison with Tom's parents about changes ahead. If there was a noisy transition between lessons, Tom and the TA would go outside for a walk or go to his room.

Sensory strategies were used frequently around transitions (e.g. rolling on his ball or running or rubbing his back). Staff made visual books for trips or changing year groups. When moving class, Tom and the TA made lots of visits to the new classroom. Language around transitions are, "Shall we just try for a few minutes? You may like it."

P6 – An ethos and environment that fosters social inclusion for children and young people on the autism spectrum

Tom was given a clear place to work away from other children by having a work station set up against a plain wall. A safe space or 'haven' was created for Tom where he could go when he needed. This was a small room near the classroom that was usually used for group activities. This room was tailored to his interests (e.g. he had a board of Pokémon cards on the wall). The room had a table and chairs and a tent. Tom can invite children into his space and will share it. Black curtains have been used to lower the light and staff hope to install dimmers in the future.

If Tom was finding a situation challenging, he was supported to go to the safe haven, given a weighted item, such as a lap pad, and enough time to calm. This may take up to an hour depending on his level of arousal. Staff supervised Tom from a distance. As he calmed, staff gave him a written or verbal message offering a choice of activities that he liked (e.g. iPad with a favourite game such as Minecraft). In the school grounds, Tom had a den in the woods where he could go, supervised by a TA. Tom found it calming to be outside in the fresh air amongst the trees.

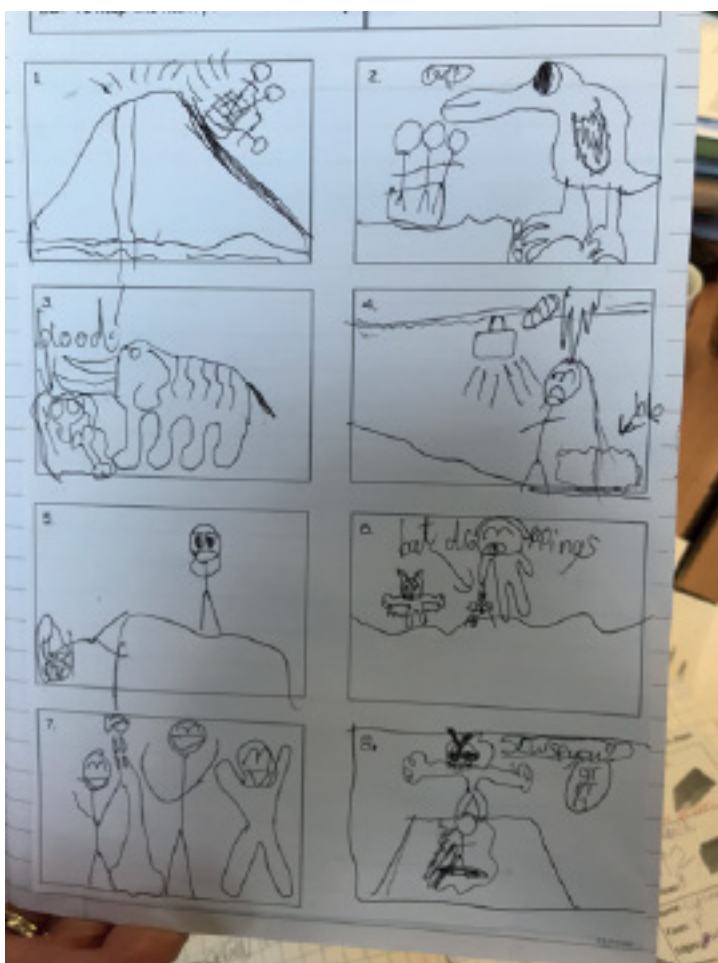


Learning and development

P8 – Adapting the curriculum, teaching and learning to promote wellbeing and success for autistic children and young people

The curriculum and its delivery were adapted for Tom. He has a morning routine where he goes to his own safe room first. Friends can come in to say hello. Once the class is settled, Tom joins them for English. He stays in class for whole class teaching and is allowed to draw or doodle as the teacher talks, but then goes to his room to complete his work. During transition times, he goes to his room first and then moves to the next activity.

Tom has differentiated work. The TA might reword the question in English or adapt the Maths questions. His own interests are used to engage him (e.g. Tom is given the option to write about Minecraft instead of Egypt.)



He has produced some wonderful stories with drawings on topic work.

Tom has been given a 'pause' folder so that if he is finding a piece of work difficult or he does not want to do it, it goes in the folder to be completed at another time or day. There is an expectation that the work will still be completed at some point.

Group work

The TA models and works with Tom on sharing, turn-taking, skipping, football and the beginnings of team games. This is mostly paired work as Tom finds being part of a group of children challenging. Using a peer to model activities works well for him.



Transferable practice – actions you could try in your setting

Here are some ideas you could try in your setting that worked for this child:

- Create a safe space indoors for the child to use
- Create a safe space outdoors
- Give alternative topics for writing activities which capitalise on the child's interests
- Assess the child's sensory issues by completing the AET Sensory Checklist with the staff and the child's parents
- Use a scale to assess a child's emotional state and take appropriate actions
- Give enough time for a pupil to calm with an activity they enjoy, (e.g. time on iPad, crafts, walk outside)
- Ensure partnership working with parents as they are the experts on their child
- Use a 'pause folder' with alternative activities. Press pause if the child is not engaging, give an alternative activity and come back to the activity at another time
- Plan transitions carefully with the use of Social Stories, pre-teaching, visuals and conversations with parents
- Provide choice in a limited way to prevent overload.
- Use now and next boards to transition to the next activity.
- Use a peer to model turn-taking, sharing, waiting and board games.

References

Autism Education Trust Sensory checklist can be found attached to the AET National Autism Standards for Schools which is free to download from www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk

Gray, C. (2015) *The new Social Story book*, Arlington, Texas: Future Horizons Maths Rockstars Time tables <https://trockstars.com>

Further resources

From the Autism Education Trust (www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk) (most are free to download)

National Standards for Schools 5-16 which sets out key elements of good autism practice in settings for autistic children and young people aged 5 to 16 years

Competency Framework for Staff 5-16 which sets out knowledge and skills required for teaching staff working with autistic children and young people aged 5 to 16 years

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Case Study B: Oasis Academy Connaught

Type of school	Nursery and Primary school in the South West of England
School website	oasisacademyconnaught.org
Number on roll	377
Age range	3 to 11 years
Focus of the case study	Mindfulness; structure; emotional regulation, communication
Principles illustrated	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understanding the strengths, interests and challenges of the autistic child and young person4. Workforce development to support autistic children and young people5. Leadership and management that promotes and embeds good autism practice6. An ethos and environment that fosters social inclusion for children and young people on the autism spectrum7. Targeted support and measuring progress of children and young people on the autism spectrum8. Adapting the curriculum, teaching and learning to promote wellbeing and success for autistic children and young people

Context

The academy has a small number of children diagnosed with autism but a larger number whom staff consider are autistic, but not diagnosed. The nursery caters for children aged between three and four years. There are a number of children who enter the school without being able to talk and so speech, language and communication are priorities for the academy. The academy is also in an area where there is high deprivation and staff run a food bank for the community. Over 13% of the population have a named Social Worker and 12% are classified as homeless. There are, on average, four referrals to Social Care in a week.



Understanding the individual with autism

P1 – Understanding the strengths, interests and challenges of the autistic child and young person



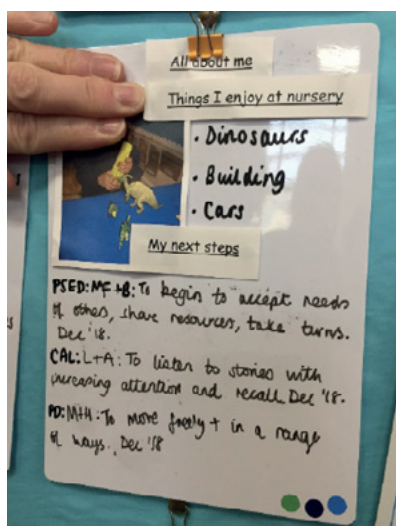
The strategies used take account of research work on understanding the brain. Staff have implemented an approach called ‘Settling the glitter’ for calming children who are dysregulated. The original idea was from Susan Kaiser Greenland in her book *The Mindful Child*. It was promoted as a strategy by the Momentous Institute in their blog <https://momentousinstitute.org/blog/settle-your-glitter>. This was introduced through assemblies and is evident through visuals around the school (e.g. cards and displays).

It is a strategy used with all children and provides more than de-escalation – children are given space to calm before discussing an issue and then have mentoring to work through an issue at a later time.

Visuals are evident throughout the whole school environment both inside and out. Notices are supported by photographs and symbols with aim of being accessible to all.



To develop independence, there are visuals giving information in all activity areas, showing how resources should be used. These include images of the children modelling how to use the resources.



On display for every Early Years and Year 1 class are individual pupil whiteboards showing the pupils’ interests and targets. These show the next steps for the pupils and ensure that all adults know the targets.

Displays are used to celebrate the pupils’ individuality and interests. Each child has a written descriptor inside a hand print on what makes them special.

The interventions used with all children in the nursery are interventions that support autistic children. These include use of Social Stories (Gray, 2015), the use of visual timetables and the Five Point scale developed by Buron and Curtis (2003).



The school operate an autism-based intervention with all children called Time to Talk (Shroeder, 2001) as well as Talk Boost (developed by The Communication Trust and I CAN, with support from the Every Child a Chance Trust). This is part of A Chance to Talk (ACTT) which is a social skills group intervention which focuses on things like turn-taking. There is a dedicated Learning Support Assistant for Speech and Language.

Positive and effective relationships

P4 – Workforce development to support autistic children and young people

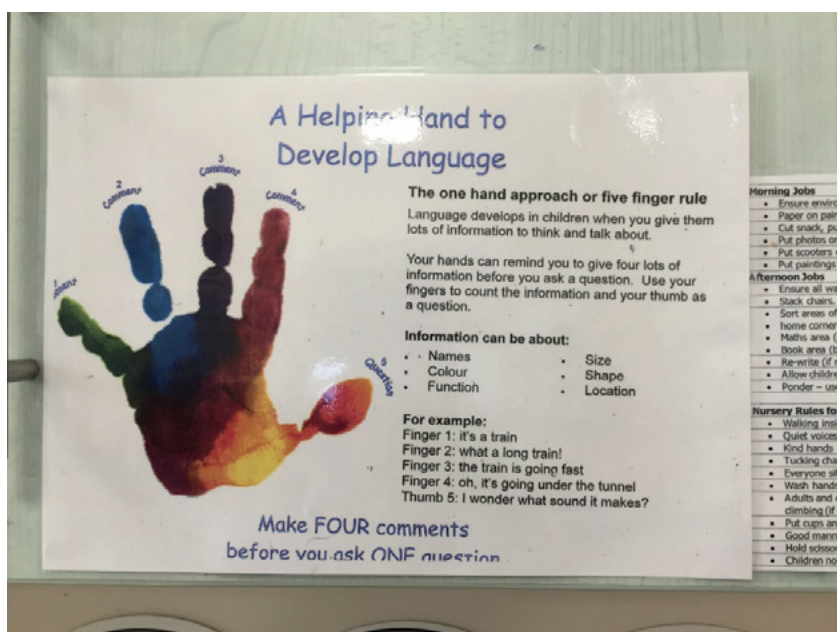


Senior leaders have an in-depth understanding of SEND and the needs of autistic children and this informs how practice develops and is embedded across the school.

Visuals are used widely to reinforce good practice. There are prompts for teachers and TAs in all the outdoor spaces so that every opportunity to develop communication and interaction is taken.

Leaders operate a coaching model with staff and regularly monitor how they are working with the children. They provide very specific feedback on their interaction with the children with the aim of developing consistency.

There are reminders displayed throughout the whole environment to support staff working with the children. This includes a consistent approach to the development of language through the use of 'A Helping Hand to Develop Language'.





Enabling environments

P5 – Leadership and management that promotes and embeds good autism practice



Leaders take every opportunity to extend provision into outdoor learning and create safe spaces using creative approaches. For example, a small cycle shed was purchased to use as an outdoor quiet reading area as this was much cheaper than purchasing bespoke equipment (see photo).

The academy has an organisation-wide approach to inclusion with the view that their provision is planned to include everyone. The senior leadership view is to *'allow them to be who they are'* and *'the child is always at the centre'*.

Senior leaders feel that, *'We're the people who have to change, not the child with autism'* and the focus is on key aspects linked to learning and well-being as a result. This is illustrated by their view that it doesn't matter whether the child is sitting on the carpet or not – the important thing is that they are accessing the learning and making progress. Children are very accepting of others as a consequence of this view.

Senior leaders say, *'We understand all behaviour has meaning'* and they look to identify the meaning in the behaviour. Staff do not confront behaviour immediately as sometimes there needs to be the opportunity to de-escalate before a conversation can be had with a child so staff might direct an escalated child to an activity before discussing an issue. This approach is embedded throughout the organisation.

P6 – An ethos and environment that fosters social inclusion for children and young people on the autism spectrum

There is a nurture room available for children to use in break times and unstructured times. Spaces are designed to give the children the opportunity to self-regulate as they can choose to access the space when they need to.

All children can make appointments to see the lead adult in the nurture room. She is the Designated Safeguarding Lead and parent link. As a consequence of the high level of need in the school, this is a very busy space. Children also bring other children to the nurture room. In an example given, one child brought another child to the room saying, *'He has a wobbly feeling in his belly'*. The school makes wide use of a set of key phrases that children can use to express how they feel.

Staff give generously of their time and might have a child staying with them as a 'lunch buddy' during lunchtime if the children need support.

There is a classroom put aside called INKIE for children with the most complex needs and this is staffed by two TAs, one of whom is Forest School trained. Children who work in the room breakfast together with the staff. The room is set up to reduce sensory stimulation with a low-lit area. There is a section in the classroom which has been enclosed and covered to create a Gruffalo cave. This provides a dark haven for children to go to when needed.



Children are taught how to self-regulate in this space. Visuals are displayed to encourage self-regulation by giving the children a sequence of actions to do when they are angry.

Characters are used to represent emotions so that these can be discussed with the children. These are based around the characters in the film *Inside Out* (Pixar, 2015) and are shown in visuals. Each emotion is personified by a different character which is thought to help children put a visual to an emotion.

Separate, personal work stations have been set up with 'now and next' signs. Each workstation has its own set of resources including a personal 5 Point Scale and resources to support learning for that child, such as an alphabet mat or a word list. 'Now and next'

is also used to structure the group learning with a display on the wall. This classroom has its own separate, outside space. Other children can also access this area as a quiet space at lunch time.

Learning and development

P7 – Targeted support and measuring progress of children and young people on the autism spectrum

The staff use the Leuven scales of active engagement in learning (developed by the Research Centre for Experiential Education at Leuven University, under the supervision of Professor Ferre Laevers, 2005) to plan for intervention and gauge readiness to learn. Staff take two snap shot points on entry and then at later points. Staff use this with children in the nursery and reception, and in Year 1 transition, if there are concerns.



P8 – Adapting the curriculum, teaching and learning to promote wellbeing and success for autistic children and young people



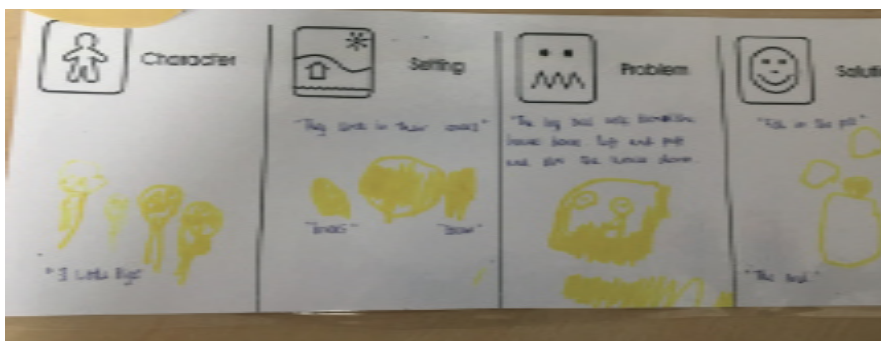
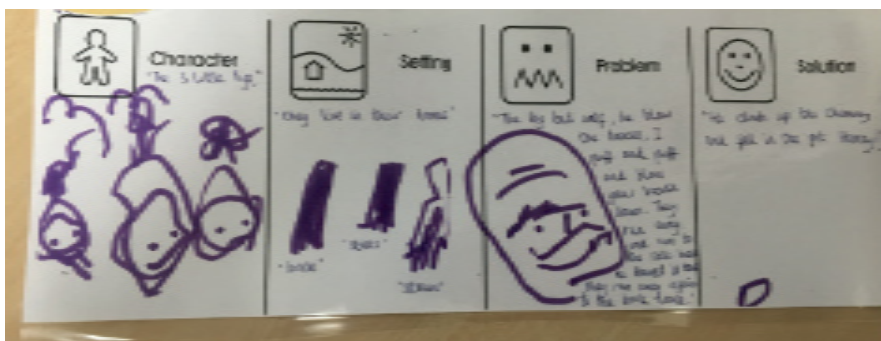
Early years continuous provision is looked at and adapted on a daily basis and there are high expectations for progress. An activity will start the week at one level of expectation and build throughout the week to become more challenging. For example, a Maths activity that the children can choose may start with the numbers up to 5 and then move on to numbers up to 10 by the end of the week.

The Early Years curriculum has been adapted to have an emphasis on developing speech and vocabulary. Provision is planned linked to a theme (e.g. books) and then staff check whether this will fit with all the children's interests. One child, who had an interest in dinosaurs had the work on Funny Bones adapted. The teacher included outside activities linked to dinosaurs and fossils.

Staff use the 'Tales Toolkit' (<https://talestoolkit.com>) and have found this effective in encouraging children to communicate and to tell their stories. They have also had safeguarding disclosures as a result. The Toolkit uses four clear symbols (character, setting, problem and solution). These are used during small group sessions or as a whole class. The children can then use these symbols in their own stories.

Nursery Examples

In this example, the children are able to talk about characters, settings, problems and solutions. Tales Toolkit is an online resource and more information can be found at <https://talestoolkit.com>.





Transferable practice – actions you could try in your setting

- Consider creating outdoor safe spaces by repurposing storage equipment
- Create a den inside the classroom to provide a safe space with reduced sensory stimuli
- Create individual pupil cards listing pupils' interests and targets for all staff
- Create visuals to provide learning prompts for staff in the environment
- Use visuals in which the children model use of equipment and reinforce these with the use of symbols
- Use zones of regulation resources linked to characters in films such as *Inside Out*
- Include activities which directly link to individual children's interests
- Create a staffed nurture space where children can go at lunch or break time.



References

- Buron, KD and Curtis, M (2012) *The Incredible 5-Point Scale* (2nd. Edition) AAPC publishing
- Gray, C. (2015) *The New Social Story Book*, Arlington, Texas: Future Horizons
- Greenland, SK (2009) *The mindful child; how to help your kid manage stress and become happier, kinder and more compassionate*, New York: Simon and Schuster



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Case Study C: Hinderton Special School

Type of school	Community special school for autistic students at all levels of ability in the North West of England
School website	hinderton.cheshire.sch.uk
Number on roll	44
Age range	3 to 11 years
Focus of the case study	Yoga, Forest schools and Outdoor Learning, Colourful Semantics
Principles illustrated	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understanding the strengths, interests and challenges of the autistic child and young person4. Workforce development to support autistic children and young people6. An ethos and environment that fosters social inclusion for children and young people on the autism spectrum7. Targeted support and measuring progress of children and young people on the autism spectrum8. Adapting the curriculum, teaching and learning to promote wellbeing and success for autistic children and young people.

Context

The school is a primary provision for autistic pupils. There are six classes within the school. One class has seven pupils with the highest level of need. The pupils frequently have co-occurring conditions with autism.

Understanding the individual with autism

P1 – Understanding the strengths, interests and challenges of the autistic child and young person

The school runs a number of interventions to support pupils on the autism spectrum.

Yoga

Sports funding is used to pay for yoga to be taught across the school. Since its introduction, staff have seen fewer incidents of distress and anxiety. They feel yoga is emotionally calming for the pupils. This initiative started as a trial for a term and was then continued as it had a positive effect. It is now embedded in school practice and the staff have found that yoga is good for de-escalation. The physical and mindfulness elements of yoga are



incorporated into the timetable. The yoga teacher works for one day a week at the school and prioritises pupils where she feels she can have the most impact. The sessions last for 15 minutes with the older pupils and about 5 minutes with the younger pupils in Reception. The Yoga teacher has trialled different group sizes and found that working 1:1 and 1:2 works better than a larger group, as some children do not participate when in a larger group.

Some basic resources are required. The school uses a meeting room with yoga mats on the floor and blankets for relaxation. Sessions originally took place in the hall but some pupils found this too large a space. Some of the pupils watched at first before they joined in.

The yoga teacher is a qualified sports coach and a yoga teacher for both adults and children. She does an initial visual assessment with each child to identify a focus (e.g. to determine whether they struggle to stand or sit or whether they have weak muscle tone). Each pupil has a pupil passport with their sensory needs described and the yoga teacher has access to this. She collects the child from their classroom and begins to assess their needs that day through how they walk to the session and interact with her.

A yoga programme is specifically designed for each child. For example, she does balance postures with one child to work on proprioception as she found this helps to calm the pupil. No picture visuals are used as she physically models the positions and movements. She felt a visual timetable might be a barrier to activities and she needs to use a flexible structure that is not too prescriptive so that she can be responsive to the children's needs on that day. She also uses a very individualised approach with clear beginnings and ends to the session indicated in ways each child enjoys and understands.

She feels that the use of yoga to support children with autism works well because autistic children are often anxious and yoga is designed to work with the sympathetic nervous system. She believes autistic children just "get it". It does not need to be made fun in the same way as is necessary for a neurotypical child. She believes an autistic child feels the benefit and is therefore motivated to do the yoga. It does not rely on language as the teacher can demonstrate poses and can put children into position. Yoga can also change a child's physical posture for the better. For example, one child always sat in the W position and he can now sit cross-legged which puts less strain on his hips. The yoga teacher also uses gestures. For example, a tap on the knee reminds the child to move from the W pose to crossed legs. These gestures are passed on to the staff and to the parents at home so they can be used as a reminder.

This close involvement between the yoga teacher and the child has provided insights that staff would never have had into the child's needs (e.g. one child does reverse breathing when he is very anxious). The yoga teacher checks to see how the pupil has coped with the yoga session emotionally and talks to the class teacher straight after the session to let them know what she has worked on. She writes up each session and videos sessions to share with the staff and parents.



After doing yoga for a while, the staff have found that children begin to use the techniques themselves, independently. The yoga teacher said that the aim was to “give them ownership of self-regulation”.

The sessions are followed up in class with group sessions for relaxation and breathing. One class also has a list of meditations to do. The yoga teacher is working on individual cards for the children with poses they can do at home. Parents are positive about the impact of yoga and more involvement is planned for parents. They will be invited to do yoga themselves to assess the benefit and can come in and observe what helps their child. The yoga teacher has also held a session for staff to support their well-being and to give them an understanding of what the children do in the sessions.

Yoga has been used with all the children and the yoga teacher feels all can benefit but some respond better than others. Teachers have observed the most impact with more complex children.

Forest schools and outdoor learning

This intervention arose from staff seeing mainstream primary pupils in a school next door participating in an assault course. School staff saw the potential this might have for their children. This was led by an external provider who delivered military-style outdoor activities. The providers were all ex-military, some having an educational background.

School staff felt that this approach was a risk but has been one that has really paid off. The providers had a measured and clear approach and were willing to be flexible and invest their own time in planning. The providers operate appropriate differentiation, listening to what the school staff say and then changing their practice to accommodate the needs of the children. Over time, they have developed their knowledge of what works but are also reliant on the staff to continue to guide them.

Staff had an initial two-hour meeting with the providers to talk through case studies of the children’s needs and to discuss requirements in detail. The team proved to be very flexible and open to adapting their way of working with a special school. The providers are responsive to issues arising with the children in their planning. For example, one child had issues over fire safety at home so the providers presented a session around this.

The school invited the team in for a free trial and this resulted in very positive feedback from staff through staff questionnaires. The team works with all the children from Reception through to Year 6 and uses a space outside, designated as the outdoor learning classroom. The children are organised into three groups with similar levels of social interaction and need.

This initiative has started a move towards much more use of outdoor learning in the curriculum. Staff reflected on the impact of the externally provided lessons and then responded and started using the outdoors in their own lessons. This was a phased approach and was carefully managed and introduced, as follows:

- Detailed planning with providers, including a two-hour meeting to scope it out and another meeting about the curriculum to plan the first session
- Free ‘taster’ session for the children by providers which was evaluated with staff
- External providers delivering sessions in school – evaluated at the end of a term
- School developed their outdoor classroom area



- Staff began to integrate the use of outdoors into wider curriculum provision
- Opportunities were then incorporated into medium term planning
- The school are now looking to achieve the national ‘Learning outside the classroom’ quality mark.

Providers started with a taster session which was based on a story *Little People and the Dragons*. Resources can be simple such as coloured threads to make a fire, big canopies, parachutes and hammocks. They used new materials that the children had not worked with before and that engaged the children’s interest. One member of staff commented that “all of a sudden it became exciting to sit on a piece of tarpaulin”.

The school felt that relationships with the provider and their flexibility have been key to making the project a success and a real partnership has developed. The project required a large initial investment of time with providers although they now adapt the activities themselves on the strength of knowing the individual pupils. There have been additional meetings with the providers to develop further links with the PE curriculum.

This work has also benefited from joint working with other schools (e.g. a joint curriculum project with all the local mainstream schools linked to a topic on habitats).

The outdoor learning area has been developed over time. Fundraising took place to buy materials and this resulted in the creation of an outdoor ‘hide’ with the external providers. This is now used weekly.

Impact

The lead teacher for this said, “*engagement is the most important pre-requisite for learning*” and, in terms of engagement, this initiative has had a real impact. It has also raised expectations for the staff team about what the children are capable of. It has demonstrated that the children can do the activities and barriers to their participation have been removed through the providers “*encouraging independence in an outdoor safe environment*”. The impact has also been apparent through improvements in shared learning and the children’s ability to work in larger groups. The school has seen huge positives in the development of social skills and interaction. They have found that it significantly lowers incidences of behaviour which is challenging immediately after the sessions and that the children are more settled through the day. They have also found it develops independence, as children often work in pairs and small groups and so adults are able to withdraw into the background.

A staff survey was conducted to measure the impact of outdoor learning in different areas of the curriculum. Staff said they had seen a positive impact on self-esteem and language. Children have a higher motivation for outdoor learning and are more enthusiastic to share their learning (e.g. wanting to share with the Deputy Head, the number of bugs they had found on a hunt). The children associate being outside with having fun and there is a free-flow of activities. Movement and breaks are more natural and less artificial than in the classroom. Staff also feel that being outside supports self-regulation and it is easier to take a break from an activity outside. Staff commented that children “*love being outside and playing – associate it with having fun*”; that it is “*more natural and relaxed*” and that “*movement and sensory breaks easily occur*”.

School staff have observed that many children with autism have fewer male role models at home and at school. These providers are an all-male team and they feel this has helped to address this imbalance.



Benefits to the children are that they work in team games more; it develops their communication with others and their social skills; they participate in outdoor and adventurous activities; have their sensory needs addressed; and develop their fine and gross motor skills. They are also learning and listening in an unstructured environment. Outdoor learning has enhanced their problem-solving skills, including children with severe learning difficulties. There have been positives reported by families with children joining in more with going for walks and engaging in other outside activities with the family.

Staff also enjoy the outdoor lessons as they see the children engaged and feel that being in a different environment improves flexibility. All curriculum subjects are covered in the outdoor lessons (e.g. Stone Age cooking for history; throwing a ball and counting in French; art work on tints, shades and sketching).

The children's work on outdoor learning has been recorded using Screen Castify by Google which is a free resource.

The children can select their own photos. A film for the governors was created of activities the pupils have enjoyed. Two children have been nominated as junior safety officers and one child used Screen Castify to make a presentation to share with the school. He worked with a staff member to make a slide show and chose pictures and wrote a commentary on a whiteboard first. He presented this to the whole school in assembly. This has also been used to do a class retelling of a story. This class wrote a story together called *The not so Haunted House*. This had a great impact and one child went home and was able to retell the story word-for-word to a parent. The teacher said this was really motivating for children and had an impact on drama and story writing and enabled them to produce the "best piece of work we've ever done".





Positive and effective relationships

P4 – Workforce development to support autistic children and young people

The staff each have their own ‘teacher personal’ stickers with their names on (e.g. Well Done from Liam). Children like to collect these like Pokémon stickers and aspire to collect the whole set of ‘well done’ stickers from each member of staff. This helps their feeling of belonging and community and has had an impact on relationship building – with children seeking out members of staff to earn a sticker.



Enabling environments

P6 – An ethos and environment that fosters social inclusion for children and young people on the autism spectrum

The SCERTS model (Prizant *et al.*, 2006) is used throughout the school to support children to become confident social communicators. Pupils are social partners (e.g. functional users of symbols or pictures), language partners or conversation partners.

SCERTS stands for:

- SC – social communication – the development of spontaneous, functional communication, emotional expression and secure and trusting relationships between children and adults
- ER – emotional regulation – the development of the ability to maintain a well-regulated emotional state to cope with everyday stress and to be most available for learning and interacting
- TS – transactional support – to help staff respond to the child’s needs and interests, modify the environment and provide tools to enhance learning (e.g. use of visuals, sensory support).

The Attention Autism approach (devised by Gina Davies in 2013) is used in the Early Years and is beginning to extend through the school. It is thought to have great benefits for children, with the exciting activities, familiarity and visual supports helping pupils to develop their attention, communication and interaction skills.

There is strong use of visuals throughout the school which are the same size and colour. Photos on the classroom and office doors show who is in and out.



Each class has an iPad and photos are taken of people and activities that are happening at the school. These are displayed easily and cheaply using 'Mixtiles' (<https://www.mixtiles.com>) and serve to promote and reinforce pupils' understanding that they are part of a social community within the school.

The first names of staff are used across the school. Evidence from SCERTS is that if children feel confident and comfortable with names, they make better progress, but this has to be taught explicitly to autistic children. Visitor's photos are taken on entry and used to create ID badges with their names on. The impact of this is noticeable as children refer to these when visitors enter the classroom.

Learning and development

P7 – Targeted support and measuring progress of children and young people on the autism spectrum

The Attention Autism approach is used and involves the following:

- An adult demonstrates the activity using visually exciting materials, large movements, rhythm, minimal speech and varied intonation and facial expressions to hold their attention.
- Other adults in the group observe the activity with the children with keen interest and attention (the adults' focus must be on watching the activity, not on interacting with the children – as this takes attention away from the activity).
- Visual plans are shown on a mini whiteboard showing the sequence of activities.
- Items are crossed off the visual plan as they are completed.
- The adult clearly indicates the transition between activities (e.g. "flour shake has finished").
- Using repetition of a routine and anticipation of their turn helps to maintain the pupils' attention.
- There is a clear start, middle and end to each activity.

This way of working develops over time from an observed activity led by an adult, with involvement of the children who wish to become involved, to a demonstration of an activity with a partner which the children then do; and working towards small group engagement.



P8 – Adapting the curriculum, teaching and learning to promote wellbeing and success for autistic children and young people

The impact of outdoor learning by an external provider has resulted in this being extended into teaching across the curriculum. A visual timetable for the outdoor lesson is written on a mini whiteboard.

An example of a Maths lesson outside which focused on time, with a Year 5 and Year 6 class, was provided.

- The starter activity involved the children independently doing activities for a minute – how many hops, jumps, circuits of an area in a minute. These were modelled first by an adult and timed by one of the pupils using a timer. This took place in an enclosed activity area.
- A number square on the playground was used with questions being directed to the children. Children were asked to stand on a square to start with. Question examples were, “If you have a 10 in your number then run round the square and add on 10 more, where would you be?” This was led by the class teacher and supported by the teaching assistants. The children seemed used to the game and were comfortable with it. Repetitive activities such as this provide familiarity and security and develop understanding.
- The teacher demonstrated telling the time to the group using a big clock face drawn on the playground and using sticks (big and little) to mark the hands.
- The children then had their own clock face drawn inside hoops on the playground to do their own questions. Children were supported to move the sticks or they did this independently according to need. Kinaesthetic learning supports sensory regulation. Staff supported the children through using language like, “We can do this.”
- The children were clearly used to the routine with some working independently and there was 100% engagement. Children were reminded about how to use the practical resources, “Use your cards if you need to – they are there to help”.



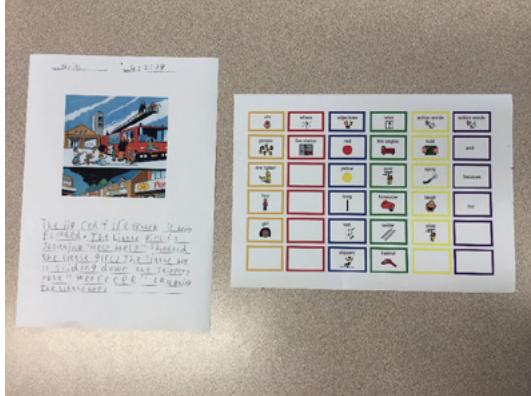
Activities were very calmly offered so that it was clear that children are used to this way of working. An indirect approach and polite respect were demonstrated through the use of language such as, “Can you ...?” instead of “Will you ...?” but this also gave clear expectations to the children. The activities used were low cost, as well as freely available, natural resources.

Adaptations were made for children who needed a break from the activity. Children who were dysregulated for whatever reason, were allowed to move away without comment. Staff moved alongside the pupil without judgment, used reduced language and then gradually supported the student to return to the group.



The outside space was organised into areas such as gardening, Forest school, playground, enclosed activity area, climbing, and sensory equipment. Playground rules were displayed which were simple and easy to remember (e.g. kind hands, kind words, kind feet).

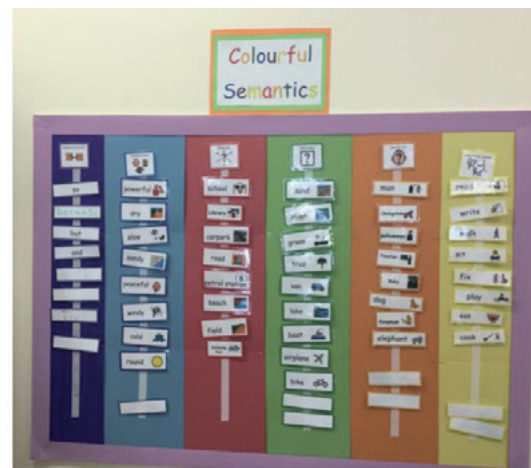
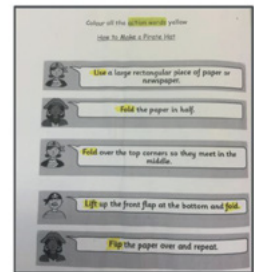
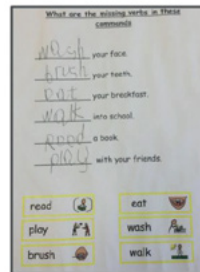
Colourful Semantics (<http://www.integratedtreatments.co.uk>)



The school uses colourful semantics which some mainstream schools also use. The speech and language therapist delivered a training session two years ago on this. One teacher has adapted this approach to use with her class to develop writing and this has had a massive impact and been a turning point for their success at written work. She uses it to provide a bank of vocabulary as examples to extend the children's vocabulary as well as to develop grammatical structure and sentences. The children have their own grids which they select from, when writing. The teacher

also finds that it helps the children to learn parts of speech as the words are coloured, for example, blue words are adjectives. Using this approach, this teacher, "realised pupils were more able than we give them credit for" and that staff need to question whether they "are using their time with the children to best effect?" The school uses colourful semantics for story planning and other areas of curriculum. Colourful Semantic cards can be used to prompt conversations and build vocabulary. This is a good example of where a school has recognised the potential that a different approach can have to support children in areas of their learning.

The little boy with an orange, stripy hat is looking at a map because they are lost.





Transferable practice – actions you could try in your setting

- Develop self-regulation strategies for each pupil, including Yoga or mindfulness techniques
- Following training, use the Attention Autism approach to develop attention skills, engagement, listening, participation and communication
- Take photographs of visitors to the school, and print and use these as their badge
- Develop an outdoor learning area
- Investigate the use of the Colourful Semantics programme to develop vocabulary and writing
- Produce a photo montage or video for annual reviews, meetings with parents. governors and assemblies.

References

Davies, G (2013) *Attention Autism* (www.ginadavies.com)

Colourful semantics – see www.integratedtreatments.co.uk

O'Neill, J., Bergstrand, L., Bowman, K., Elliott, K., Mavin, L., Stephenson, S and Wayman, C, (2010) The SCERTS model: implementation and evaluation in a primary special school, *Good Autism Practice Journal*, 11, 1, 7–16

Prizant, B, Wetherby, A, Rubin, E, Laurent, A and Rydell, P (2006) *The SCERTS model: a comprehensive educational approach for children with autism spectrum disorders* Baltimore: Brookes.

Watson, J, Davies, G. and Winterton, A (2017) An evaluation of the Attention Autism approach with young children with autism, *Good Autism Practice Journal*, 18, 2, 79–93

Further resources

Autism Education Trust (<http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/>)

National Standards for Schools 5-16 which sets out key elements of good autism practice in settings for autistic children and young people aged 5 to 16 years

Competency Framework for Staff 5-16 which sets out knowledge and skills required for teaching staff working with autistic children and young people aged 5 to 16 years

AET Parent/Carers Guide: What to look for in your child's school: a document for parents/carers to complete identifying what they deem to be important for their autistic son or daughter – free to download from the AET website.

AET Tools for Teachers

AET Progression Framework – a means of recording progress specifically for autistic children and young people and for setting learning intentions.

The AET also has a number of **autism training hubs** in different parts of England which offer training on autism at different levels and for the different age phases (*i.e.* Early Years, 5 to 16 and 16 to 25 years) – see the AET website (<http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/>) for details of the training hub closest to you



Case Study D: The Garden School

Type of school	All age community special school for students with autism and severe learning difficulties in London
School website	www.the-garden.org.uk
Number on roll	136
Age range	4 to 16 years
Focus of the case study	Purpose built designed-environment, assessment and the curriculum, professional development, shared ethos
Principles illustrated	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understanding the strengths, interests and challenges of the autistic child and young person2. Enabling the voice of the autistic child and young person to contribute to and influence decisions3. Collaboration with parents and carers of autistic children and young people4. Workforce development to support autistic children and young people5. Leadership and management that promotes and embeds good autism practice6. An ethos and environment that fosters social inclusion for children and young people on the autism spectrum7. Targeted support and measuring progress of children and young people on the autism spectrum8. Adapting the curriculum, teaching and learning to promote wellbeing and success for autistic children and young people

Context

The criteria for a place at the school are to have a diagnosis of autism and to be at Level P4 or above. The majority of students have severe learning difficulties (SLD) and a few students have moderate learning difficulties (MLD). There are 7 to 8 students per class, with 5 Teaching Assistants (TAs) in the primary classes and 4 TAs in the secondary classes.



Actions taken and impact

The school moved to its own newly designed site and the staff had a great deal of input into the design to make it a low arousal setting. As a result, the environment is calm throughout and there are many spaces available that are secure and allow break out space for students. The site is a state-of-the-art learning space and was awarded the 2014 RIBA architectural prize for the Best Educational and Community Building in London.

Understanding the individual with autism

P1 – Understanding the strengths, interests and challenges of the autistic child and young person

Staff have been trained in SCERTS by Emily Rubin who developed the programme with colleagues in America (Prizant *et al.*, 2006). Students are social partners (functional users of a picture or symbol system), language partners or conversation partners.

SCERTS stands for:

- SC – social communication – the development of spontaneous, functional communication, emotional expression and secure and trusting relationships between children and adults
- ER – emotional regulation – the development of the ability to maintain a well-regulated emotional state to cope with everyday stress and to be most available for learning and interacting
- TS – transactional support – to help staff respond to the child's needs and interests, modify the environment and provide tools to enhance learning (e.g. visuals, sensory support).

To start out on the approach, the staff make a full assessment of each student which takes four days per student. Most students are at the 'language partner' stage, and some being 'conversation partners' and a few students are at the 'social partner' stage. The transactional support element of the programme is embedded throughout the school and is evidenced through the use of 'first and next' individualised timetables and within-task schedules.

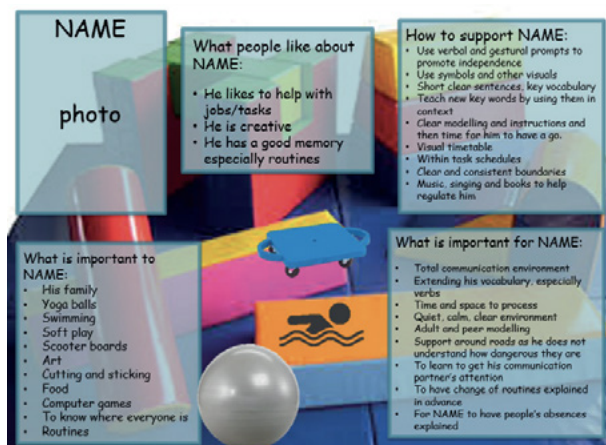
Staff use core vocabulary boards and have additional core words that are relevant to the context (e.g. the board in the playground includes the word 'chase'). The school is very strong on student voice and on communication and staff aim to generalise learning and communication into new situations supported by visuals and communication systems such as the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) developed by Bondy and Frost (2002).

The *Zones of Regulation* programme (Kuypers, 2011) is used throughout the school to teach students strategies to recognise and regulate their emotional and sensory state. Some students can verbalise which 'zone' they are in. Others can make a sentence using symbols to express this. Some students are working on the tools they can use to move back into the green zone when they are in amber or red.

The school uses Augmented Aids for Communication (e.g. a mini iPad provides visuals of key vocabulary). Software such as Clicker 7 has been used and the staff find that students are motivated to create longer sentences when using the iPad than when using PECS.



In every classroom student profiles are displayed shown in the example below. There are positive behaviour support plans underneath.



The students use objects of reference for communication (e.g. a plant pot is used on their schedule for gardening). Schedules are displayed consistently in every class. These are linear and staff use objects of reference, symbols or words. Within-task mini schedules are used to break down activities for students. Students are encouraged to go to their own board to find out what is going to happen next. Older students write their own schedules and have choosing boards to do this from.



All rooms make use of a finish box for completion. Predictable structures like this are replicated throughout the school.



A green and red board shows the steps in activities, where the steps start off on the green side of the board and, as these are completed, the students move them to the red side.

Audible cues as well as visual cues are used to signal transition from one activity to the next.

Prevention of challenge is key, and restricted physical intervention is rare. If required, staff use *Approach* created by Bill Thorpe. This is based on the natural movement of the body. When supporting students, an element of movement is always involved.



P2 – Enabling the voice of the autistic child and young person to contribute to and influence decisions

The school has allocated a space within the building as an independent living flat. The flat has a kitchen/living room, bathroom and bedroom so that young people can develop their skills in household tasks. The occupational therapist (OT) consulted secondary students to ascertain what they wanted in the flat. They wanted a calendar in the living room and games they could access. Student leadership is developed by giving students responsibility for certain tasks. Some students have key fobs that open secure doors so that they can deliver the register to the office. Some students prepare and deliver snacks for other classes and take resources to classrooms.

Positive and effective relationships

P3 – Collaboration with parents and carers of autistic children and young people

The school demonstrates a commitment to parental involvement through an extensive training programme. They run 40 workshops a year for parents. These are run by the Family Support Worker, middle and senior leaders, by Speech and Language Therapists and the Occupational Therapist. They focus on topics that particularly link to life at home

and share strategies used at school. The ‘hard to reach’ parents are approached by the Family Support Worker.

P4 – Workforce development to support autistic children and young people

There is a real commitment to whole school training and to having a highly trained staff who then train staff across the school. For example, all staff have been trained in *Attention Autism* developed by Gina Davies. There is now an accredited trainer on the staff who continues to train new staff as they join the school. Another class teacher teaches the staff about Intensive Interaction (now referred to as Communication Responsive interaction) (Caldwell, 2008; Hewett, 2018). There are Makaton (Walker, 1980) trainers on the staff.

The whole staff team for each class attends student progress meetings. This ensures a shared language, shared aims and consistent strategies. This collegiate approach provides additional professional development and gives a coherent approach. An example of a shared strategy relates to a student who is tactile defensive (touch resistant). Staff agreed a scripted response to what they would say when they were going to touch the student. In another example, with a student who was very resistant to change, the team agreed to use the same language and the same pausing. This close collaboration provides benefits for all staff with different levels of expertise as the more experienced staff model to less experienced staff and share strategies in the discussion and planning.

The speech and language therapists have an office on site. This has a room next door with a one-way window so that therapists can observe the students. The school uses NHS speech and language provision and boosts this with additional time they purchase. Support is used for universal work and for specific projects. Different therapists have leadership responsibility for different projects that is a good model of distributed leadership. Projects include supporting interaction in the playground, developing a total communication approach and the use of PECS.



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Headteacher
K. Khan

SPRING TERM INDUCTION 2018

Sessions usually take place in the training room upstairs near the dining room on Thursdays until 5pm unless otherwise stated

Date	Time	Session	Trainer
Thursday 24 th January	3.45pm	Autism-what you need to know	Emma Day (Sal.T)
Thursday 31 st January	3.45pm	The Garden school curriculum	Giovanna Zullo
Thursday 7 th February	3.45pm	Communication Practices	Karen Brock and Rebecca Kasinski (Sal.Ts)
Thursday 14 th February	3.45pm	Positive Behaviour Support	Marcin Lubanski Pablo Menendez
Thursday 23 rd February	3.45pm	Assessment at The Garden	Giovanna Zullo
Thursday 7 th March	3.45pm	SCERTS	Caroline McCallum (Sal.T)
Thursday 14 th March	3.45pm	Independence skills	Sarah Jones (OT)
Thursday 21 st March	3.45pm	Makaton 1	Rebecca Kasinski and Emma Anctaw (Sal.Ts)
Thursday 28 th March	3.45pm	Makaton 2	Rebecca Kasinski and Emma Anctaw (Sal.Ts)
Thursday 4 th April	3.45pm	Communicate in Print	Emma Day (Sal.T)
	TBA-3 hours	Child protection	Pat Quigley

THE GARDEN

Speech and language therapists also deliver parent workshops and staff training. Each therapist is linked to a class and liaises with the teacher, provide group work and give some 1:1 support.

New staff have a 2–3-month induction programme which they attend on a weekly basis. Part of a sample programme is given.

Enabling environments

P5 – Leadership and management that promotes and embeds good autism practice

There is an intensive induction programme in place to bring new staff up to speed with the school's ways of working. Different people input to the content of this that has evolved over time. All staff including TAs, office staff and the Business Manager attend the induction programme as all have contact with students. Information about the extensive range of professional development on offer is detailed under collaboration and workforce development.

P6 – An ethos and environment that fosters social inclusion for children and young people on the autism spectrum

The whole environment had been designed with the needs of autistic young people in mind and with input from staff.

There is a calm, low arousal environment created by muted and neutral colours and the use of low lighting which can be dimmed. Blinds can be adjusted at all windows. Corridors are wide and white and this was a deliberate design feature. The classrooms are off a central corridor. There are many internal spaces where all equipment can be hidden or enclosed, giving a space where distractions can be limited. There are windows with frosted glass down the corridor so that adults can look in to the classrooms but students are not distracted by the view at their eye level.



Each room has an enclosed playpod area outside as shown in the photo. This is a fenced area with a gate leading to the playground which can be kept open or locked and provides a secure, outside area. Additional break-out spaces can be used flexibly as there are a variety of sizes, many of these with covered outside space.



There is a connecting withdrawal room between each of the primary classrooms. There is a range of sensory rooms (e.g. soft play with audio and visual stimuli, a light room with two Omi projectors and an outside space). There is a splash pool that is used for sensory regulation and play. Classes have timetabled access to this space.

This is also used for students to work on independence skills. It has an adjoining changing area and shower where students need to get ready for swimming, look after their belongings and get dressed afterwards. There are enclosed workstation areas in classrooms for use when required.


There are separate primary and secondary dining rooms, with muted colours and blinds to create a low arousal environment. Other rooms have been designed for a specific purpose (e.g. a dance studio, primary and secondary art and food technology rooms).

There is also a large breakout space on the first floor with an outside area for secondary students. Calming music is played in classes at times.





Learning and development

P7 – Targeted support and measuring progress of children and young people on the autism spectrum

The school is moving away from P levels and staff use building skills maps instead. These form the scheme of work and programmes of study are incorporated into these. Skills map examples include things like a ‘using my hands’ skills map. This starts off with touching textures and builds in a progression all the way up to writing. Two examples are given.

THE GARDEN 		PSED Skills – Looking after myself			
Personal Care	Showering/washing (OT can support/assess)	Turns shower on independently	Adjusts water temperature	Identifies the correct toiletries to bring in the shower	Uses toiletries correctly
		Washes each body part independently	Washes own hair	Checks body is clean and turns off shower	Uses towel to dry own body
	Toileting (OT can support/assess)	Shows discomfort when nappy or underwear is wet	Shows awareness of when bowel movement/urinating is happening e.g. hiding	Assists with changing nappies and wiping e.g. lifting legs/arms/rolling as needed	Communicates when wet/discomfort (moving towards, signs, symbols, etc.)
		Tolerates being in the toilet room	Sits on the toilet	Urinate in the toilet	Defecates in the toilet
		Wipes after going to the toilet	Communicates when needs to use the need to use toilet (moving towards, signs, symbols, etc.)	Flushes the toilet	Washes and dries hands after using the toilet
	Brushing teeth (OT can support/assess)	Tolerates toothbrush in mouth	Tolerates toothpaste in mouth	Takes toothbrush to mouth	Brushes front teeth
		Brushes back teeth and tongue	Applies toothpaste on the brush	Spits into sink / rinses mouth	Rinses brush
	Personal hygiene (OT can support/assess)	Tolerates having hair brushed	Tolerates having nails clipped	Tolerates having nose blown	Lifts the arm to have deodorant applied
		Applies deodorant to self	Brushes own hair	Clips own nails	Blows nose
		Follows routine/timetable to complete personal hygiene tasks independently	Shows concern about own look and cleanliness and attends to personal hygiene based on this e.g. deodorant	Styles own hair e.g. ties up / gel	Shows concern about own look and cleanliness and attends to personal look based on this e.g. hair clips, chooses clothes e.g.
	Dressing/undressing (OT can support/assess)	Helps others to dress her/him, e.g. lifts arms for t-shirt, lifts leg for shoes e.g.	Pulls off easy items once started to be taken off e.g. socks and top when already over head	Pushes arms through top when over legs or feet through socks/trousers when started	Removes coat / jacket / open shirt independently
		Can put on easy clothing such as jackets or open-front shirts without zipping or buttoning them	Able to put on a t-shirt with a little help.	Able to put on shoes, although the right and left orientation may be incorrect.	Able to put on socks with a little help for the correct orientation of the heel.
		Able to pull down simple clothing (i.e. pants with elastic waist band) independently e.g. toileting	Fastens Velcro shoes	Is able to unbutton three or four buttons (not including top button)	Able to zip and unzip a jacket if the shank is already connected
		Able to unzip a jacket and separate the shank.	Is able to button three or four buttons (not including top button)	Able to insert the shank together to zip up a jacket with practice.	Able to find the front side of clothes and dress themselves with supervision
		Able to place socks on with appropriate orientation	Ties shoelaces	Identifies and tries to correct dressing mistakes, e.g. clothes inside out, back to front, both legs in one leg hole, etc.	Checks clothes after dressing e.g. neatness
	Feeding (OT can support/assess)	Tolerates food on hands	Tolerates food on mouth	Holds spoon/fork to bring food to mouth	Scoops/pierces food with spoon/fork and brings to mouth



Skills Map: Using My Hands (Writing)												THE GARDEN											
PUPIL												STARTING DATE											
Using my hands (OT can support / assess)	Movement	Pushing	Pulling	Squeezing	Wiggling	Scrubbing	Dropping	Picks up small objects	Cutting with scissors	Wiping													
	Touch *See messy play texture hierarchy for further information	*Light dry textures e.g. feathers	*Heavy dry textures e.g. flour	*Light wet textures e.g. water	*Heavy wet textures e.g. corn flour and water	Food substances	Cold textures	Warm textures	Surprise textures	Using glue to stick items													
	Mark making and letter formation	Showing interest in Mark making – e.g. Printing with hands, rolling cars through paint	Spontaneous Circular scribble,	Spontaneous horizontal or vertical scribble	Imitates horizontal and vertical lines	Imitates circles	Marking making on vertical surface	Traces letters and numbers	Copies letters / numbers	Capital letters from memory	Lower case letters from memory	Writes numbers from memory											
Writing	Pencil grip (OT can support / assess)	Shows preference for dominant hand		 Palmar Grasp	 Digital Pronate grasp	 Modified tripod grip	 Tripod grip	Applies consistent level of force when writing															
	Hand writing (OT can support / assess)	Moving from left to right on the paper	Writes letters close to each other to form a word	Two words together with a space between	Knows the position of different letters on a line e.g. 'y' or 't'	Writing on the line	Start writing on a new line	Maintains consistent letter size	Writes short sentences														
	Typing (OT can support / assess)	Finds all letters of the alphabet	Puts a space between words	Deletes characters	Types numbers 0-9 in date form	Can return to a new line	Can move cursors	Capitalises letters appropriately	Uses full stops	Using capital and lower case letters appropriately	Able to write a sentence.												
	Scissor Skills (OT can support / assess)	Able to hold scissors with thumbs on top		Able to complete single snip		Able to complete cut an A3 straight line		Able to cut out a simple shape (triangle / square)		Able to cut out a more complex shape (circle, image)													

For the assessment of progress, the school is still using P levels at the moment. Staff carry out a baseline assessment on the student's arrival using the B Squared software (www.bsquared.co.uk) to evidence and assess learning for students with SEN. This is updated twice a year in January and June to see how much progress there has been and whether the student is making the required progress according to CASPA (Comparison and Analysis of Special Pupil Attainment) (www.caspaonline.co.uk) (a simple software benchmarking tool for the analysis and evaluation of attainment and process for SEN students who are working significantly below age-related expectations).

The staff carry out a *Determining Communication* assessment as part of the SCERTS framework. Initially, staff used to complete the whole of the SCERTS assessment but have now created their own, shorter version. Amy Laurent, who co-wrote SCERTS, has given the school a new version for assessment. Termly targets are set as mini steps towards EHCP targets and these targets are linked to SCERTS.

An independence scale is also used from 1, which indicates that a student is not able to do something on their own and requires a full prompt, to 5 where a student requires no support or prompt.

The staff are trialling the *Evidence for Learning* app (www.evidenceforlearning.net). Photos and videos can be captured and tagged and linked to frameworks including SCERTS. Staff can also upload their own frameworks to link things to and can set tags for monitoring purposes such as the pupil premium. This will provide centralised monitoring as well as a portfolio of progression and success as managers can access what teachers are doing. The targets need to be approved by managers.

The school uses 'COMFOR' which stands for 'forerunners in communication' and was developed in the Netherlands by Ina Van Berckalannes and colleagues (Noens *et al.*, 2006). This assessment is used to develop the best communication and transactional systems for the student and to generate targets.



P8 – Adapting the curriculum, teaching and learning to promote wellbeing and success for autistic children and young people

The school initially operated a subject-based curriculum. They realised that this was not meeting the needs of their students or leading to success. Staff identified that they had three types of learner which they characterised as leaves, trunks and roots. This also fits with the SCERTS model. The curriculum was therefore modified into these three strands.

The *roots* curriculum is a sensory and exploratory curriculum (P3-4) covering the essential key skills and knowledge that their students need to learn. Engagement in learning is through play and sensory exploration and provides students with opportunities to develop skills within meaningful contexts.

The *trunk* curriculum is a semi-formal curriculum for students at P5-7. As well as learning through exploration and play, this provides the opportunity for communication, student voice and the development of functional skills.

The *leaves* curriculum is described as a more formal curriculum for learners from P8 – KS1. It provides students with opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills within a wider range of purposeful contexts, linked to the National Curriculum, where appropriate.



The emphasis is on creating a curriculum which includes purposeful, meaningful activities that have application in real life and helps to build independence and skills. The photograph shows the classroom set up to make toast.

Their framework is topic-based following the Early Years *Development Matters* headings. Primary and EYFS do a topic based approach but focus on real life tasks. This moves into cross-curriculum topics. Later on, in the secondary classes, the approach becomes enterprise focused (e.g. making soap and other items to sell).

They have held an Art Exhibition of students' work at the local library and the students provided snacks and drinks and served these to the people viewing their work.

The school garden is used to grow produce (e.g. herbs are grown and used to make soup to sell in the school café and lavender is used to make lavender bags). Students work in the garden doing work-related activities, which go towards their ASDAN (qualification to help young people develop knowledge and skills for learning, work and life <https://www.asdan.org.uk/about>) in horticulture.



There is a school café and this is staffed by students and sells drinks and snacks to staff and visitors. The emphasis is on communication as well as developing other skills. Visuals are very evident in the café.

Secondary students work in the food technology area to prepare and make the food, such as soup and croutons. They then transport this down to the café on trolleys. The students do the clearing away and washing up. The secondary students make snacks for the primary students and have a special uniform they wear to deliver these snacks.



The degree of prompting needed gradually reduces as the students develop the skills and video is taken to show this progress.

The dance studio provides a multi-purpose space used for sensory work and for developing group social skills. The Arts is a strength of the school and the school is staffed to reflect this, having a dance tutor, a drama tutor and two art tutors. To complement the curriculum, the students visit galleries and work with a visiting artist.

Transferable practice – actions you could try in your setting

- Use Clicker on an iPad to support communication and to support writing for some students
- Use software to gather evidence of learning which can be shared with parents
- Commit to whole school/staff training with a focused induction programme for new staff and an ongoing training programme
- Display the students' profiles in every class.
- Use personalised visual timetables in every class showing a progression through objects of reference, to symbols, to words to student created
- Use written within-task schedules to show items to do on the green (left) side which are moved over to the red (right) side when completed
- Use of skills maps to outline the progression in the development of skills
- Use students' interests as motivational tools
- Use SCERTS framework to measure students' non-academic progress
- Focus on work-related learning tasks incorporating real life situations into the school environment
- Incorporate real-world structured tasks within the curriculum to build skills in these areas
- Use visiting experts to supplement curriculum experiences, (e.g. visiting artist; drama group).

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intellectual disability, *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 50, 9, 621–632

Prizant, B, Wetherby, A, Rubin, E, Laurent, A and Rydell, P (2006) *The SCERTS model: a comprehensive educational approach for children with autism spectrum disorders* Baltimore: Brookes.

Watson, J. Davies, G. and Winterton, A (2017) An evaluation of the Attention Autism approach with young children with autism, *Good Autism Practice Journal*, 18, 2, 79–93

Further resources

<https://www.asdan.org.uk/about> Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN)

www.bsquared.co.uk B Squared assessment <http://www.caspaonline.co.uk> CASPA assessment www.evidenceforlearning.net Evidence for learning app

Autism Education Trust (<http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/>)

National Standards for Schools 5-16 which sets out key elements of good autism practice in settings for autistic children and young people aged 5 to 16 years

Competency Framework for Staff 5-16 which sets out knowledge and skills required for teaching staff working with autistic children and young people aged 5 to 16 years

AET Parent/Carers Guide: What to look for in your child's school: a document for parents/ carers to complete identifying what they deem to be important for their autistic son or daughter – free to download from the AET website.

AET Tools for Teachers

AET Progression Framework – a means of recording progress specifically for autistic children and young people and for setting learning intentions.

The AET also has a number of **autism training hubs** in different parts of England which offer training on autism at different levels and for the different age phases (*i.e.* Early Years, 5 to 16 and 16 to 25 years) – see the AET website (<http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk>) for details of the training hub closest to you



Case Study E: Priestnall Secondary School

Type of school	Mainstream secondary school in the North West of England.
School website	www.priestnall.stockport.sch.uk
Number on roll	1276
Age group	11 to 16 years
Focus of the case study	Developing a whole school ethos on inclusion for all students and multi-disciplinary working
Principles illustrated	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understanding the strengths, interests and challenges of the autistic child and young person2. Enabling the voice of the autistic child and young person to contribute to and influence decisions3. Collaboration with parents and carers of autistic children and young people5. Leadership and management that promotes and embeds good autism practice6. An ethos and environment that fosters social inclusion for children and young people on the autism spectrum7. Targeted support and measuring progress of children and young people on the autism spectrum8. Adapting the curriculum, teaching and learning to promote wellbeing and success for autistic children and young people

Context

Each year group has approximately 260 students. The school has 22 Looked After Children (LAC) and 53 students with EHC plans. There are 38 autistic students currently on roll, and others who are not diagnosed. The NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) figure is zero.

The school employs 14 TAs, two Speech and Language Therapists (1.4 FTE), a part-time Educational Psychologist (EP) and a full-time psychotherapist. There are excellent links with Inscape House School (an independent school run by the Together Trust). Priestnall school has four autistic students on dual roll at Inscape House school.



Understanding the individual with autism

P1 – Understanding the strengths, interests and challenges of the autistic child and young person

Case study of Max (fictitious name) Year 10 (aged 15)

(information taken from a discussion with Max and his form teacher)

In Year 7, Max said there were lots of changes to adjust to, the two main ones being new pupils and the new environment. It said it was hard for him to adapt to the new classrooms and to the teachers. He felt that variety was a good thing and that he now had a lot more friends than he had at primary school. He described Priestnall as a very friendly place and said that staff gave advice on how to calm down, rather than criticising you when you had a meltdown. He said, *“If staff see I am upset, they will ask me what’s wrong and what’s making you feel depressed – or say, Can I do anything to help you?”*

Max’s form tutor is very proactive and inclusive and visited him at primary school before he started at Priestnall. He had visits to his new school and Social Stories were created for him. He was given a book with photos of key staff before he started.

“If bullying is reported, staff will always act and there is a 5-point scale where 1 is a warning – 2 is ...3 is...” Max knew this scale very well. There is a way of students being able to report bullying anonymously (a button on school website) and the student will receive a reply from a member of staff. There are anti-bullying ambassadors and lots of staff to deal with issues that arise.

Max enjoyed the residential trip to Wales in Year 7. Max leaves lessons a few minutes before the others in his class to avoid the crowded corridors. He has had the same form tutor all the way through secondary school and they have an excellent relationship. He is a member of a social club where he plays on computers with others. His special interest is especially Pokémon, his favourite character being Pikachu. Max also enjoys watching YouTubers playing gaming videos and wants to create games in the future as a career.

At lunchtime, Max sometimes goes to a quiet room (N2) designated for students who need a safe space or he goes to the library or the IT suite. He also goes to the room in class time, saying, *“If the class is really noisy I will put my headphones on or go to N2. I like a quiet place to chill out. When I arrive, I chill out using an App called Headspace on my phone or a tablet. This is very useful.”*

Max’s advice to new students is to *“be yourself and have a lot of fun and make new friends. He said, School is a place not only to learn but where you make friends. This school focuses on mental health, your life, your happiness – equally important as education.”*

When asked what he would like to be different Max said, *“Nothing. This is cool. This is awesome.”*

Max ended the discussion by saying, *“I hope this meeting goes well and Priestnall is a really great school and should always be respected and well trusted.”*

Meeting with some of the autistic girls at Priestnall school

A discussion was held with six girls who attended the school they were in Year 7 (n=3), Year 9 (n=2) and Year 11 (n=1).

The girls said that the staff really understand autism at Priestnall School and one girl said that it made her want to take up a career working with children with SEN when she left school. They said staff would set up social groups around a particular interest (e.g. Lego)



and that they could go to the library at lunchtime if they wished. Four of the girls felt it was easier to do homework at school as there were fewer distractions. Some staff use the App *My Homework* which they found helpful.

The SALT and TAs run groups for the girls on social understanding and to practise the skills required. Some girls do not want to share their diagnosis but the school ethos helps some to disclose their autism. Priestnall convenes several social groups for children and uses the *Talkabout* (Kelly) approach to develop conversation skills.

P2 – Enabling the voice of the autistic child and young person to contribute to and influence decisions

Student Passports

All students have a passport which they help to create. The six autistic girls we met were not sure all subject staff read this, but when they do, they find it very helpful. A member of staff may have 10 to 15 passports to familiarise themselves with.

Positive and effective relationships

P3 – Collaboration with parents and carers of autistic children and young people

TAs communicate with parents and may see parents at the end of the school day and the TAs write a report for review meetings. The school has organised a parent-carer conference entitled *Working together* and 80 people attended. The school also organises parent-carer events around transition and staff have an open-door policy where parents can arrange to meet at other times.

Case study of Debby: mother of Max (fictitious name)

Debby set up the Parent and Carer magazine *Aukids* ten years ago and this is very well received. She wanted to portray the positive side of autism and parenting as she felt so much of the literature focused on the difficulties. She said about the school, “*They ‘get’ autism here*”. She had looked around a number of possible schools and asked if they had quiet spaces and if they could allow Max to type instead of handwrite. Of the Priestnall staff, she said, “*I did not get ‘what the heck ...?’ answers as I had at other schools – they knew what I was asking about and were doing it already.*”

She said she found Priestnall school when she was Googling about autism and saw a training presentation by the Director of Curriculum Support, Gareth Morewood, and wanted to find out if he was the only shining star at the school or whether he was an example of the whole school culture. Her experience has proved that the whole school has developed an ethos of including students with very diverse physical, developmental and emotional needs, including autism.

Debby explained that, “*At parents evening – whereas I used to have to explain possible interventions in the past, and the staff always asked why he would not join in or sit in the circle and I had to tell them. At Priestnall school, we do not talk about strategies, we just talk about Max and his progress.*”

Debby also explained how one of the subject teachers interviewed Max instead of asking him to do a piece of writing and marked him on the interview.



“There are some teachers at Priestnall school who don’t get it as well as others – as there are in every school – but I feel his subject teachers have been chosen just for him and his form teacher is amazing and is so straight with me. The school is not defensive and is very open to collaboration. I thought I might have to come in a lot, but I don’t as I trust them such a lot. Other parents seem similarly happy.

“Max did not talk until he was four and his self-regulation was very poor. He has had meltdowns at Priestnall but even a teacher who does not know autism well will come into the corridor and ask Max if he is OK rather than telling him off. He tries to comfort him. Staff don’t confront him – they try to understand him.”

P5 – Leadership and management that promotes and embeds good autism practice

Gareth Morewood, the school’s Director of Curriculum Support, has been a huge influence on the development of the school’s SEND policy and practice and has developed a website which contains many of the resources developed. He has written about the need for the whole setting to be saturated in an inclusive ethos (Morewood *et al.*, 2011) and has developed the school’s workforce and expertise to address the needs of students with autism and with SEND.

A series of short interviews were held with staff who had key roles on the staff in relation to the autistic students.

The school’s ethos is that:

“Real leadership is seeing potential in a member of staff and helping them to develop.”

All the work done by different staff and disciplines is interwoven and there is corporate responsibility for all students. The staff also have a commitment to being involved in research and link with the University of Manchester to generate ideas and enable University students to develop their research skills. A similar network has been established at the University of Southampton (Parsons *et al.*, 2019).

Discussion with Ellen: the school’s Speech and Language Therapist

Ellen is employed directly by the school and works term-time only. She works in eight feeder primary schools and their nurseries as part of Service Level Agreements well established for a number of years. She currently runs individual sessions with five students at Priestnall school completing assessments and supporting them through individualised therapy packages. Some students find group sessions challenging. She runs social groups with another 13 students.

She uses Alex Kelly’s *Talkabout* social communication programme and feeds back to TAs about the students. Lego groups have also been set up. Ellen has trained up three TAs in interventions and they now run these groups on their own.

Through discussion, Ellen helps to raise students’ awareness about their conversation skills and how this is the basis of forming friendships. Attendance at the groups is always a choice. Ellen explains the group to a student and then suggests they give it a go. The group usually consists of a mix of Year 7 and 8 students, not all of whom are autistic. These groups are a safe space to have a conversation that might not go very well and to learn from that. Ground rules are established and they play games and have fun. Students are asked what they would like to gain from the group.



Ellen also links with pastoral staff and TAs. In this way, TAs can be briefed and students flagged up. She attends the school briefing for TAs and is very proactive. Teachers approach Ellen for advice and support and Ellen might then observe a student and give feedback. Ellen reminds teachers about using the pupil passport.

In addition, Ellen works with Clare Langton, the school's psychotherapist and autism lead. Therapies and ideas from both Clare and Ellen provide a wrap-around package for autistic students. Ellen also attends ADAPT meetings – the post diagnostic meetings commissioned and funded by the CCG (Clinical Commissioning Group) and part of the Local Authority Autism Pathway. These are held at the school and result in an action plan for the autistic students.

Discussion with Julie: the manager for the Teaching Assistants

The 14 TAs at the school are solely employed for students with SEND. There are 3 TAs for the students on dual roll with Inscape House special school (employed by Inscape House school), 2 TAs for Looked After Children and 9 other TAs. All the TAs receive a lot of training in their paid time and their career development is encouraged. Not all TAs have experience of autistic students. Their training is delivered by Clare Langton, the school's psychotherapist.

The Director of Curriculum Support, Gareth Morewood, determines which students are given priority in terms of allocation. Some students have TA support for the whole time. The TAs are deployed according to individual need. If a student that a TA is supporting is absent, then the TA goes to a Board in the office and Julie will have marked with a red sticker any other students who are in urgent need in that lesson (or with orange and green stickers for less urgent students). A blue sticker is used to show the TA can engage in some online training and a yellow sticker denotes admin time.

There are some good autism courses online. The school uses *Future Learning and Profile* which is free. The TAs have sensory assessment training and Julie has made a blog on TA practice.

Discussion with Tanisha and Sheridan: two Teaching Assistants

Tanisha has been at the school for three years and Sheridan for six years. Tanisha works with one student 75% of the time and with a further five students. She would like to train as a Speech and Language Therapist and has been skilled up by Ellen, the school's SALT, to run social groups on her own. The TAs really like the Board system described above, as it enables staff to know exactly where the TAs are.

Sheridan works with a Year 7 autistic student most of the time. He has found transition from the primary school hard and the student currently leaves school after Period 3 as a short-term measure as part of an agreed flexi-schooling package. Sheridan did a *Boost Your Reading* course last term and wants to roll this out to other students. She tried this successfully with a Year 9 student with a low reading age.

Both Tanisha and Sheridan thought that most staff used the student passports very well. They said that some staff struggle to know which behaviours arise from their autism and which are a choice. Their response is, "*If in doubt assume autism.*" Clare Langton, the school's psychotherapist, has given the two TAs 6 weeks of training in 20-minute blocks during their paid time.

Discussion with Greg Loynes: the link teacher for Inscape House Special School

Greg is the Assistant Headteacher at Inscape House school which is a non-maintained, independent special school. He is responsible for Admissions, Transitions and Outreach. The school has 105 students on roll from 15 Local Authorities.



Inscape House school funds the TAs for the three students at Priestnall and those students are met at the door and stay with the TA until they leave or are picked up by their parents. These students are on roll at both schools as part of a Partnership Arrangement funded by the Local Authority. The students can move seamlessly between Inscape House school and Priestnall school. One student who missed a lot of education at primary school and was home schooled for a time, started at Inscape House in Year 6 and then transitioned to Priestnall gradually and by Year 8 was full time at Priestnall. Another student, came to Priestnall in Year 7 and did well, but then developed mental health issues in Year 9 and went to Inscape for Years 10 and 11 and passed 5 GCSEs. He is now in his second year at a University abroad.

Peer awareness sessions on autism

Greg runs peer awareness sessions at Priestnall and talks about hidden disabilities to class groups. He will talk to the autistic students in the class beforehand and ask them if they want to be involved in the discussions or not. Greg delivers whole school assemblies about heroes in autism like Steven Wiltshire. He shows them a photo of St Paul's Cathedral for 5 minutes and then covers the photo and asks them to draw it. He then shows Steven's picture, drawn from memory in all its amazing detail.

Discussion with Dr Rachael King: the School's Educational Psychologist

Rachael is employed part-time by Priestnall School on a term-time only basis. She works in six feeder primary schools (6 hours a month in each) and a nursery. She has set up a nurture group with TAs in the nursery. Rachael had experience of Priestnall as a Trainee Educational Psychologist and so the Priestnall staff already knew her well.

Rachael spent a lot of time carrying out needs assessments to inform the process of transferring Statements to EHC plans. Students who are due to leave Priestnall school are reviewed and a new report produced for transition. Her work at Priestnall largely involves assessment and report writing but has input into supporting the Curriculum Support team with strategies and approaches. She has regular meetings and joint supervision with Ellen, the SALT and with Clare, the psychotherapist, and will discuss students who are struggling or who are recently diagnosed.

Rachael's view of the school is that Priestnall staff are very supportive and creative. Flexi-schooling is often not well regarded by other schools but Priestnall school has found that some autistic students find full-time attendance overwhelming and do not have the emotional capacity for this. Attending part-time and studying fewer subjects can work very well and serve to keep students in education. This is an example of flexi-schooling and is used as part of a planned, short-term measure designed to enhance engagement.

Discussion with Dr. Caroline Bond from the University of Manchester on their research links with Priestnall school

Caroline's main role is to provide a link to the Trainee Educational Psychology course run by Manchester University. Trainee Educational Psychologists have experience at the school and may be on placement for one or two years and become involved in projects. At the time of the interview, Caroline and Gareth Morewood had just finished writing a chapter on girls and autism in a book subsequently published by Jessica Kingsley in August 2019. They are about to embark on a large survey with 500 students at Priestnall on their views of autism and inclusion.



Enabling environments

P6 – An ethos and environment that fosters social inclusion for children and young people on the autism spectrum

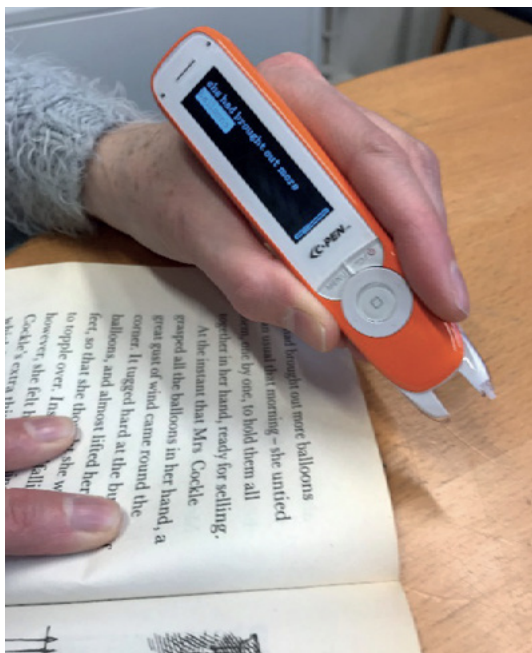


Discussion with Lucy, the Exams, Intervention and Access Assistant

Lucy liaises with teachers and students about exam concessions, making sure they are given what they are eligible for.

Scanning pens and Dragon Dictate

They have found Reader pens very useful. These cost about £190 and they scan a line of text which is stored and can be heard in spoken form. Students can use headphones with it. It is designed for use in exams, but is not so good for Maths symbols. Some readers have individual dictionaries and it is possible to change the speed, volume, and handedness.



Students also use *Read, Write, Gold* where what is typed is read back.

Dragon Dictate with predictive text is used for the majority of GCSE exams at Priestnall for one student. He started using it at the beginning of Year 11 and then the school applied for access arrangements to ensure he could use the software for his exams.



Logitech Bluetooth Keyboard

Lucy said, “The best thing we use is the Logitech Bluetooth keyboard which costs £22–25. This links to the iPad and the students can save their work in Word into the school folder and access this at home.”

Many students use these. The school has 150 iPads for students to use.

Transferable practice – actions you could try in your setting

- Consider how a whole school or setting approach to good inclusive practice can be developed or enhanced
- Consider the employment of different professionals to support the work with autistic students (e.g. SALT, EOP, OT, psychotherapist)
- Consider making links with local Universities to develop research ideas and evaluate practice
- Transition – make resources with photos of key staff and places for students who would benefit and use Social Stories to support their understanding
- Run peer awareness sessions for different year groups to inform them about hidden disabilities including autism
- Organize an event for parents and carers to provide information, education, support and to foster community and belonging
- Consider how TAs and subject staff are kept up to date with key information on autism and individual students
- Consider alternative ways to record for those students who find handwriting difficult (e.g. *Dragon Dictate*, voice activated software)
- Support students with reading by using a Reader pen.

References

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Hebron, J. and Bond, C. (eds) (2019) *Education and Girls on the Autism Spectrum, Developing an Integrated Approach*. London: Jessica Kingsley



Further resources

Sophie, Clark J and Griffin, S (2014) Sophie: A personal perspective on Asperger syndrome, *Good Autism Practice Journal*, 15, 2, 68–70

Carroll, F (2019) Supporting students with autism and PDA: a personal perspective from a 14-year old student, *Good Autism Practice Journal*, 20, 1, 27–28

<http://www.gdmorewood.com> – a website which contains many resources developed at the school.

Autism Education Trust (<http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/>)

National Standards for Schools 5-16 which sets out key elements of good autism practice in settings for autistic children and young people aged 5 to 16 years

Competency Framework for Staff 5-16 which sets out knowledge and skills required for teaching staff working with autistic children and young people aged 5 to 16 years

AET Parent/Carers Guide: What to look for in your child's school: a document for parents/carers to complete identifying what they deem to be important for their autistic son or daughter – free to download from the AET website.

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Case Study F: Phoenix School

Type of school	Community special school for pupils with Autism; Speech, Language and Communication Needs; Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs and Moderate Learning Difficulties in London.
School website	www.phoenix.towerhamlets.sch.uk
Number on roll	264
Age range	3 to 19 years
Focus of the case study	Autism outreach work, pupil voice, working with parents, recording pupil progress, sensory assessment and strategies, professional development, autism and girls
Principles illustrated	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understanding the strengths, interests and challenges of the autistic child and young person2. Enabling the voice of the autistic child and young person to contribute to and influence decisions3. Collaboration with parents and carers of autistic children and young people4. Workforce development to support autistic children and young people5. Leadership and management that promotes and embeds good autism practice6. An ethos and environment that fosters social inclusion for children and young people on the autism spectrum7. Targeted support and measuring progress of children and young people on the autism spectrum8. Adapting the curriculum, teaching and learning to promote wellbeing and success for autistic children and young people

Context

The school is in the Borough of Tower Hamlets in Central London. There are currently 264 children on roll and numbers will grow to 380 in the next year. Within the Borough, there has been a rapid increase in the numbers of autistic children and the school is trying to meet this demand. The school has two sites and a further site is under development and due to open in September 2020. The school receives a large number of referrals but has strict entry criteria.



The school catchment area is limited to Tower Hamlets. Referrals are not taken for pupils who live outside the Borough. There are 50–60 pupils on their waiting list. The school population represents several different cultures and ethnicities, with the majority of pupils being Bengali (70%) or Somali (20%).

The school has satellite classes in two mainstream primary and secondary schools with 46 pupils (16 primary and 30 secondary-aged) and this has been a very successful initiative which began five years ago. The two schools are close and accessible. There are strong links to a Post-19 college within Tower Hamlets and the school is looking to start their own Post-16 College later this year.

Outreach work

The Phoenix Outreach Service (POS) consists of six specialist advisory teachers with experience and expertise in supporting pupils with a diagnosis of autism. The team supports 600 pupils in mainstream education and this is majority funded by the Local Authority.

The service provides very effective support for pupils across the borough of Tower Hamlets and shares the strategies developed and used at Phoenix school. The Outreach Service works with pupils from the ages of 3 to 19 years in mainstream, maintained school settings. Staff provide training for key staff, and for organisations within the community. They run termly parents' evenings and a programme of parent workshops and courses throughout the year, hosted by the mainstream schools.

Each outreach teacher works with a caseload of mainstream schools, and will allocate clusters of school visits across the school year using the red, amber and green (RAG) system. This rating is flexible, and reflects the nature and extent of a pupil's needs at the school. During the first and last half term of the school year, every school will be offered a minimum of one visit from their outreach teacher to support the transition of pupils.

Throughout the year, each school will receive a block of visits. Each outreach teacher is available to advise and support mainstream staff via phone or email and each outreach teacher timetables one emergency visit each week which is available should a crisis arise. When a child with autism receives an EHC plan, a member of the outreach service will attend an 8-week planning or TAC (Team Around the Child) meeting and provide advice and support on how best to meet their needs.

Project Search: Supported internship for 8 to 12 students

QMUL Project SEARCH is based at the Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) in partnership with Phoenix School, QMUL Student Union, Kaleidoscope Saber Associates and Tower Hamlets Local Authority. Support throughout the study programme is provided to both the intern and the employer by an Instructor and Job Coach. The aim of the supported internship is to get 8 to 12 young people fully immersed in the workplace, with the aim of full-time paid employment at the end of their 12-month programme. Career exploration and job skills acquisition occurs within 3 internship rotations, followed by personalised job-search assistance into employment and ongoing in-work support, as needed.



Understanding the individual with autism

P1 – Understanding the strengths, interests and challenges of the autistic child and young person

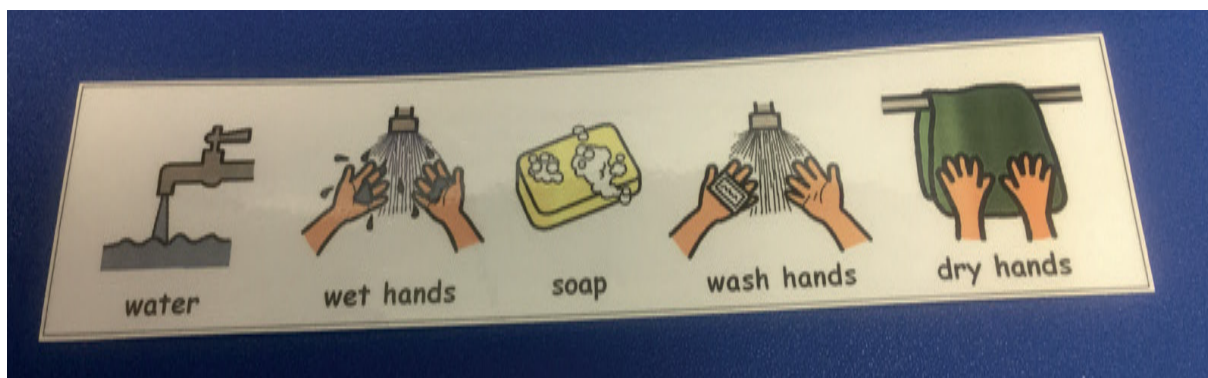
The school carries out systematic Instruction which involves breaking tasks down into very small steps. Staff have become experts in breaking tasks down into steps that the pupils can manage.



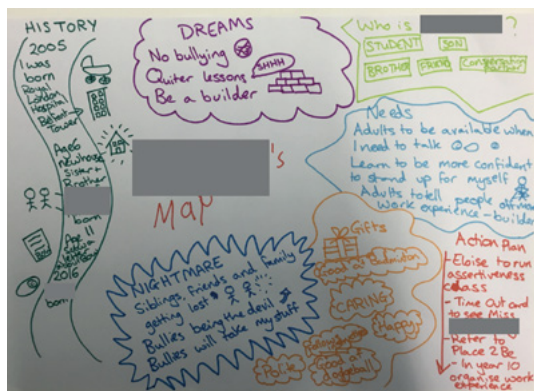
The school uses the Zones of Regulation approach developed by Leah Kuypers (2011). Staff have the coloured zones on their lanyards. Pupils will come and ask questions in class and staff will help the children identify which zone they are in.

Communication systems are visible around the school (e.g. the use of the Picture Exchange Communication system (PECS) (Bondy and Frost, 2002)). Pupil profiles are displayed in all the classrooms. There are mixed ability classes with one teacher and up to 5 TAs with 10 children.

Visuals are consistently used throughout the day for timetables and tasks.



P2 – Enabling the voice of the autistic child and young person to contribute to and influence decisions

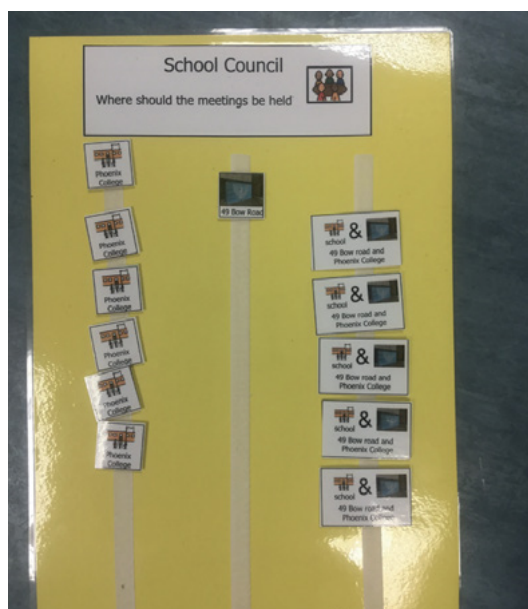
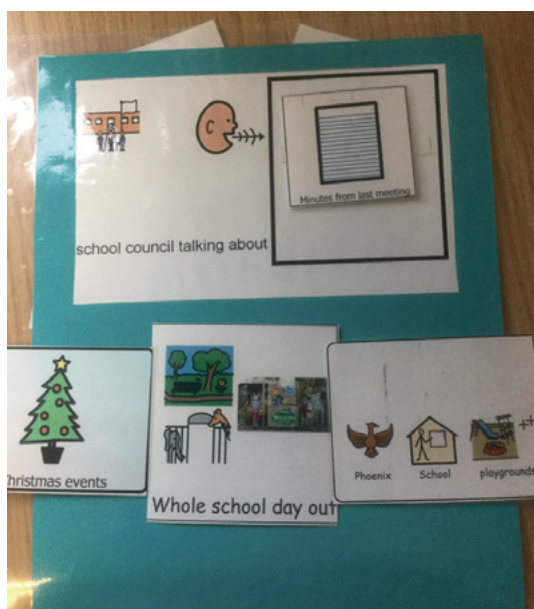


Pupil voice is promoted across the school, both in the secondary phase and upper primary. In Year 6, pupils use Talking Mats (<http://www.talkingmats.com>) as part of outreach work. They also use MAPS (Making Action Plans) (Person Centered Planning with MAPS – O'Brien, Pearpoint and Kahn, 2010) and use this visual way of recording ideas and opinions frequently. The image shows an anonymised MAP. An example of a Talking Mat work is shown in the photo.



An intervention called 'The Ideal Self' (which is based on the philosophy and theory of Personal Construct Psychology 1955, <http://drawingtheidealsself.co.uk>) is also used with pupils where they begin by talking about what they would not want to be and then talk about their ideal self. This is not autism-specific but works very well with helping pupils to understand themselves and their aspirations. Heather Moran, a psychologist, has used this approach effectively with autistic students (Moran, 2006). Students have input into how their profile template is put together. Some students put things on their profiles themselves while others provide information for the staff to include. It is very empowering for the pupils and as they are given choices about what information is put on their profile. These profiles are then shared with all who work with the pupils, including external agencies (e.g. the transport company). Sharing this information has helped transport staff to develop empathy and understanding.

Each pupil has a PowerPoint presentation they have produced for their annual review. It may be a series of pictures (e.g. showing what they are good at, what people say about them and what they want to learn). For some this is adult-led while others create this for themselves following a format.



The Speech and Language Therapist (SALT) supports the School Council. She facilitates the pupils' communication in the School Council and will prepare visuals in advance to help pupils contribute.

Visuals are used to gain the pupils' views on the school, including how safe they feel at school and how they have been helped in their learning.

The school uses various resources to help pupils understand their diagnosis such as *The ASD workbook* (Kershaw, 2011), *The ASD and me picture book* (Shaul, 2017) and *The ASD feel better book* (Shaul, 2017) all published by Jessica Kingsley.



Positive and effective relationships

P3 – Collaboration with parents and carers of autistic children and young people

The school has won an award from NASEN (National Association for Special Educational Needs) for creative ways of working with parents, being nominated by a group of parents. This is an indication of the school's commitment and success in working with parents.

The staff run an autism support group for parents. They have piloted mini workshops (weekly) which are attended by 20 to 25 parents every week. Topics covered include sleep and eating. Sometimes outside agencies are involved with running these workshops. For example, a sensory workshop was led by the Occupational Therapist and an anxiety workshop by CAMHS staff (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service). A member of staff from the school always attends. The school plan to focus on 'harder to reach' parents, exploring what they want to address (e.g. puberty for mothers of boys).

For parents who have just received a diagnosis for their child, every term the school runs the parent programme *Cygnets* developed by Barnados (www.barnados.org.uk/cygnets.htm). In addition, there are three stand-alone workshops run each term by the Outreach team based around the curriculum (e.g. on revision skills, supporting siblings, puberty, intensive interaction). Most of these workshops take place during the day but once a term an evening session is provided for parents who work. Every parent that is referred has an information sheet provided to explain what is available to attend. The young people also have an information sheet that is shared with them. The school runs a parents' conference and a parents' forum and aims to provide a one-stop shop for parents.

The staff work hard to support students to understand their diagnosis where that approach is agreed with parents. The way they approach this depends on the child's intellectual ability. Some work through *The Autism and me workbook* (Kershaw, 2011), *The ASD and me picture book* (Shaul, 2017) or *The conversation train* (Shaul, 2014). One of the parent workshops focuses on talking about the diagnosis with the family and their child.

ClassDojo (<https://www.classdojo.com>) is used across the primary department and in some parts of the secondary school to communicate with parents. This is an online app to support teachers to create a positive culture, allow students to showcase and share their learning and to share photos and videos with parents. Communications might include sharing praise points or providing information about the school day. Parents feed things back through the ClassDojo and a good communication flow is enabled.

The school is involved in an Earwig pilot (<http://earwigacademic.com/>) with Early Years. This is a Cloud-based assessment system which has not yet been shared with parents. The idea will be to upload and share photos and videos of the children in school and use these for assessment and reporting. Staff are currently working towards training TAs to add comments using an iPad.

The Outreach service is part of a Parent working party made up of representatives from CAMHS, Social Care, the National Autistic Society (NAS) and the Parent Advice Centre. The group shares what they offer to parents and identifies where support might be needed or where there are gaps.



P4 – Workforce development to support autistic children and young people

The school provides a very comprehensive induction to autism for professionals and parents/carers. Some sample training plans are attached to this case study. The training focuses on a wide range of topics. The outline plan for Summer 2019 includes:

- Introduction to autism
- Understanding and managing behaviour that challenges
- Sharing the diagnosis
- Autism and girls
- Top tips for working with a child with autism.

Enabling environments

P5 – Leadership and management that promotes and embeds good autism practice

SCERTS (Prizant *et al.*, 2006) provides the framework for the pupils' Individual Education Plans. There is a SCERTS working group consisting of the Deputy Head, the SALT, an Outreach Team member, a number of teachers and three parents. The group focuses on how best to embed SCERTS. The school is part of a group called PLASN (Pan-London Autism Schools Network), a group of 20 schools where staff meet termly to support each other. Many types of provision are included and PLASN-R is an offshoot which focuses on doing research. Thirty people from a range of universities are involved so practice and research combine to inform each other.

P6 – An ethos and environment that fosters social inclusion for children and young people on the autism spectrum

The school has sensory circuits which is class-based and individually tailored to each child. The children engage with alerting, organising and calming strategies and activities in all classes for half an hour as soon as they enter school. In some classes, they focus on only two aspects, depending on the needs of the children. This session supports the children to be ready for learning. The impact of this has been great and school staff have seen the children and the classrooms become much calmer places. Children then go straight into reading time and the class circle.

Sensory activities include activities such as threading and stacking, followed by calming activities, such as pressure. The potential of a sensory circuit was recognised by the staff when they saw it introduced by an OT into a Key Stage 3 class where there were problems at the start of the day.

Specialist staff use a coaching approach in the classroom to support staff. An Occupational Therapist provides support in the class to build capacity and to work with the staff on the sensory circuit. They provide training throughout the school and the whole school workforce will have had training on the sensory circuit by the end of 2019.

Each class also has sensory boxes which contain equipment to support pupils with sensory regulation issues and the children can ask for these at any time. They contain items such as blankets, fiddle toys and shoulder weights.



Staff use a sensory checklist to assess the child's needs.

VISUAL SYSTEM			
Over-responsive	Yes/No	Under-responsive	Yes/No
• Discomfort at bright light		• Enjoys watching objects spin or move	
• Prefers darker environments/ lights turned off		• Enjoys looking at objects from corner of eye	
• Easily distracted by visual stimuli- i.e., movement, decorations, toys etc.		• Likes bright/ reflective or spinning objects/ lights	
• Squints/ covers eyes/ cry from light		• Loves flashing toys	
• Difficulty making eye contact		• Waves hand/ object in front of or at corner of eye	
Over-responsive		Under-responsive	No Significant difficulties

There is an OT assistant who gives 1:1 support. The child always goes to this session with a TA who is then able to follow up and carry out the programme for the rest of the week. This also contributes to professional development for the TA and to the sustained impact of this work and continuity for young people.

The school is also training TAs to use on the spot and in-classroom sensory strategies when they see that a child needs sensory regulation. They are building capacity in this area and are coaching/training all the time in a variety of interventions to support the children. They use a checklist of strategies to support this:

Phoenix Checklist Strategies

VISUAL SYSTEM	
Over-responsive	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of lighting in the environment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lamp lighting instead bright overhead lighting ○ Keep lights dimmed or cover with sheer fabric ○ Use natural light when possible ○ Seat student away from source of light ○ Mindful of reflective surfaces around classroom/ school environment which may concentrate or magnify light source • Allow student to wear sunglasses or hat outdoors • Reduce visual distractions and keep classroom clutter free and organised: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Limit visual material hanging from ceiling or walls ○ Reduce clutter ○ Seat student away from doors, windows and colourful displays ○ Switch off computer and interactive whiteboards when not in use, as screensavers can be distracting ○ Store resources out of sight if possible, or cover with plain pieces of fabric • Teaching strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Stand in front of a blank wall/ screen when talking to the class so the student is not distracted by visual input behind you. ○ Be mindful of amount of visual information on worksheets/ communication boards ○ Seat student in darker area of classroom if possible (away from windows/light sources) ○ Have a dark space available in classroom (e.g., small tent) ○ Sit student near front of classroom to avoid visual distraction; sit away from doors, windows and colour displays 	
Under-responsive	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use visual resources in your teaching to gain students attention 	

The school has a member of staff who works with teachers to plan sensory environments to link to the curriculum. He runs the school sensory room; each class has a session in the room every week. The room was used by one teacher for a topic on space. The children were given space costumes to wear. Another topic covered was the jungle. This type of work is continued throughout the school with a whole area upstairs being adapted to suit particular purposes. A recent focus saw this area transformed into a film studio.



Autism and girls

The head of the school outreach team is leading some work on autism and girls. This involves 100 girls out of a 600 caseload across different settings. The group has done work for girls on puberty. This involves a range of activities (e.g. creating a visual schedule for hygiene tasks).

There are more autistic girls in the primary school than in the secondary department and the number of girls on the caseload is increasing. Some schools have a higher number of girls than others. Team knowledge is developing in this area. A half day training on autism and girls is planned. Staff are going to the forthcoming NAHT (National Association of Headteachers) conference which has a focus on autism and girls and which will give ideas for training. The school uses an autism and girls checklist which details how girls with autism can present. This was created by the Westminster Special Schools Training and Outreach team and is attached to this case study. – (see separate pdf document).

The school has invited some autistic women to talk and they plan to have a professionals' conference on this topic in the future. They are also planning to have a working party for girls with representatives from different services. The SALT has organised an

8-week programme for autistic girls. The programme is tailored to the group needs and their ages. There is a focus on social understanding. The girls work with the SALT on a different activity each week. The activities and outcomes are added into a shoe box each week. This box contains motivating items such as magazines, make-up, nail polish and cupcakes. Part of the aim of the programme is to support the girls in developing their identity and their social understanding. As there are not many girls in each class, the group is drawn from across classes. The last group had 6 girls across two KS3 classes.

Speech and Language Support

Each class has a Speech and Language Teaching Assistant who attends with the group of girls and follows up activities back in the class. These TAs have a training session every week for 1.5 hours. The TA joins in the group for girls and returns to class to consider when the ideas might be followed up (e.g. use of make-up as a motivator). The TA plans the follow up together with the speech and language therapist. The SALT also works in the classroom, 34 classes in all.

All children at the school have an EHC plan. A few plans have specific speech and language elements built in. The SALT works in class with the pupils so that work can be followed through with the staff.



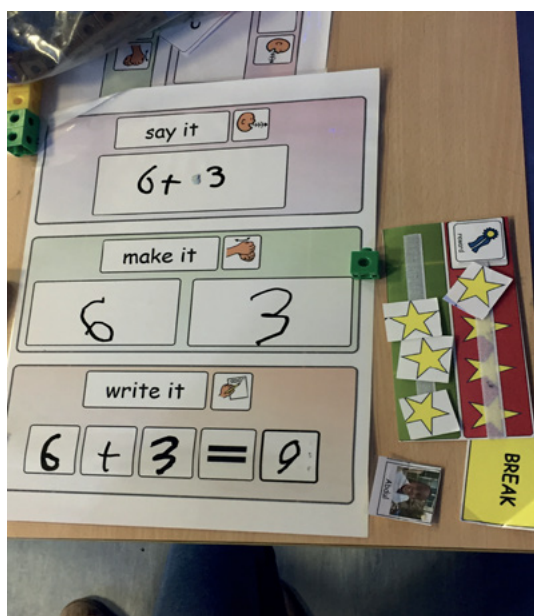
Learning and development

P7 – Targeted support and measuring progress of children and young people on the autism spectrum

Learning objectives are printed on students' work using symbols and words.

The school measures the impact of their interventions through a series of questionnaires, as part of an ongoing bigger research project.

They are piloting a different approach to monitoring progress using the SCERTS Appreciative Inquiry model and peer-to-peer monitoring. Staff have introduced appreciative inquiry learning walks to go into class to identify inter-personal and transactional support. They are working on a checklist for teachers to use as their standards. This is being adapted from the Teacher Standards and the school is using the AET Standards as an audit tool, the results of which are fed into training. The school also uses the AET Competency Framework to audit staff knowledge and skills (Autism Education Trust www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/).



Staff are making use of video evidence to capture a student's starting point and then at different points later to monitor their progress.

The school uses MAPP (Mapping and Assessing Personal Progress) which is a suite of materials developed by Mike Sissons at the Dales School in North Yorkshire. The materials divide into two sections. The first section focuses on setting

learning intentions whilst the second section, the Continuum of Skill Development (CSD) focuses on assessment. The CSD is an independent tool and can be used to evaluate progress against learning intentions which are drawn from sources other than Section 1 of MAPP. The CSD resources look at the four domains of prompting, fluency, maintenance and generalisation and is used to measure personal progress. This is being used

in a pilot project in one class in KS4 to try to ascertain the level of independence within tasks. The CSD resources can be downloaded from the website at <http://www.thedalesschool.org/article/assessment-progression-mapp/275>.

The focus is on making progress more explicit and developing a shared understanding and a scale to define what different areas might mean. This is particularly important where there are many staff trying to make a judgement. It could be used to identify which provision might be suitable in the future.

Accreditation of students' work

All KS4 and KS5 students take the ASDAN personal progress qualification or an entry level qualification (e.g. English interpreting text). ASDAN is an education charity and awarding organisation whose curriculum programmes and qualifications support young people to develop skills for learning, work and life and information about their courses can be found on their website at <https://www.asdan.org.uk/courses>. Some students take GCSEs. These students are generally those who attend satellite provision at a mainstream school. They attend their GCSE sessions with a TA.



Some of the assessment involves systematic instruction. This involves breaking tasks down into tiny steps and was developed by Marc Gold in the 1960s (<http://www.marcgold.com/marc-gold>; <http://www.mn.gov/mnddc/extra/marc-gold2.html>). There is a 5-day training programme on how to do this. Teaching is in context and the task is modelled, staff use reduced language and only single prompts.

The school is now working on making sure that targets are written so that they are clearly understood by all staff and by the students. Individual PEPs (personal education plans) are shared with parents at termly meetings. Information goes home in a home-school book. Staff make suggestions in the book as to what can be tried at home and staff believe this has enhanced home-school communication. There is a home school liaison officer who is proactive with 'hard to reach' parents.

The school uses B-squared (www.bsquared.co.uk) as a reference tool and still uses P levels, M levels (linked to ASDAN) and EYFS. Staff do not use pre-key stage standards as an assessment tool. They look at descriptors (P/M levels, EYFS, National Curriculum) for a student in these areas and identify whether they are entering, emerging, developing or secure. They use the same terminology across EYFS, P levels and M levels. This is what is fed back to parents. Staff describe to parents what these mean.

Phoenix School - Marking Scheme of Pupil Learning

	Pupil Achievement		Pupil Communication		Pupil Attainment
E	Encounter - Was in the room but not showing any awareness of the task	1	No apparent communication	A	Objective achieved - (mastered) Pupil mastered the lesson objective confidently and completes activity independently
A	Awareness: Pupil is aware something is going on depending on the level of the pupil it could be a brief change of facial expression or a glance over while they are involved in their own activity.	2	Pre-intentional communication - facial expressions, non-verbal signals		
		3	Vocalisations/'Babbling' in response to activity		
AR	Attention and response: Pupil is listening or aware of what is going on/may react to events/shows enjoyment	4	Physically Initiates Communication through hand leading, other gestures, taking adult hand, pointing or signing	B	Objective partially achieved - Adult needs to prompt the pupil several times (either physically or verbally) to achieve the objective
EN	Engagement: Pupil is involved ready to join in, depending on child's level, full physical support or it could be full verbal support, imitating etc. needs full physical support to complete task	5	Echolalia - repeating language heard		
P	Participation - Pupil more cooperative, needs minimal support	6	Physically prompted when using PECS during the activity	C	Objective not achieved - Pupil finds it challenging to learn
I	Involvement - more involved with no physical support				
GS	Gaining Skills: Pupil given a chance to do it on their own. No physical support and only minimal prompt to get them started or complete task. Pupil may achieve task but cannot repeat task	7	Uses effective 2 way communication through a selection of signing/ eye contact/PECS or spoken language unaided	The Phoenix Marking Scheme is used throughout the school day to assess the learning of pupils.	
M	Mastered- Pupil has demonstrated the skills a number of times and you are confident they can do it	8	Spontaneously comments within the activity or the environment	Choose codes from the three different headings where relevant. Several codes can be used at one time.	

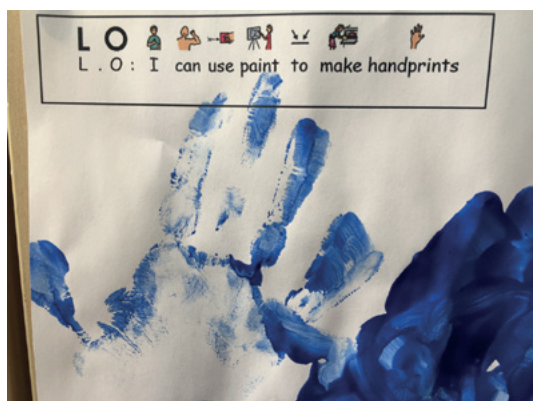
There has been an increase in the use of photo and video evidence to show pupils' learning. This often takes the format of a picture with a comment underneath using their marking code which focuses on the level of communication and level of independence achieved by the young person. The marking code is shown here.



P8 – Adapting the curriculum, teaching and learning to promote wellbeing and success for autistic children and young people

Activity sheets are adapted to suit the needs of the children using symbols and words. Alongside these, the children use mini task boards to record what they have done during the lesson, as in this Maths example.

There is a focus on work-based learning. Students in the secondary classes take part in work-related learning in the school café and run a mobile coffee cart. Students have an Enterprise Fair once a term and there are good links with employers in the area. The school has just had a two-week creative arts festival. They employ an expressive arts specialist, a musician and a designer to support this project.



Embedded practice now includes an installation once a term for a fortnight. It is set up as a learning environment – the last one was a film set. The idea is to try to give an immersive experience to the pupils. This time there was a series of doors with different situations portrayed.

Next term there will be an installation all about the brain. It will include looking at the ‘zones of regulation’ in an interactive environment so that students begin to develop a better understanding of themselves and their arousal levels.



This photo shows an immersive environment.

Students are also involved in working in the local park doing maintenance tasks as part of their outdoor work-related learning.



Transferable practice – actions you could try in your setting

- Use the AET Autism Standards and Competency Framework for each age group (Early Years, School and Post-16) in your setting to audit whole school practice and the skills and knowledge of staff. These are free to download from the AET website www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk.
- Share pupil passports/profiles with staff and others who have direct contact with the children and students, including drivers and escorts
- Use the girls checklist (kindly provided by the City of Westminster Outreach Team) to identify girls on the autistic spectrum and begin to support with appropriate strategies
- Consider using sensory strategies at the beginning of the school day to see what impact these have on students' regulation and their ability to engage in learning. Use a sensory checklist and shared sensory strategies
- Use *Sensory and Motor Strategies* by Corinna Laurie (2018) to help understand sensory differences and plan appropriate and individualised activities for students – alerting, organising and calming. The link is <https://www.autism.org.uk/products/core-nas-publications/sensory-strategies.aspx>.

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Williams, J., & Hanke, D. (2007). 'Do you know what sort of school I want?': optimum features of school provision for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder. *Good Autism Practice Journal* 8,2, 51–63. – can be accessed from the AET website in the National Standards for Schools



Further resources

Cygnets training developed by Barnardo's at <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/cygnets.htm>

Class dojo – an app to enable staff to communicate with parents <https://www.classdojo.com>

Earwig assessment system for early years <http://earwigacademic.com/>

Part 2 of MAPP – the Continuum of Skill Development can be found at <http://www.thedalesschool.org/article/assessment-progression-mapp/275>.

ASDAN <https://www.asdan.org.uk/courses>

From the Autism Education Trust (<http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/>)

National Standards for Schools 5–16 which sets out key elements of good autism practice in settings for autistic children and young people aged 5 to 16 years

Competency Framework for Staff 5–16 which sets out knowledge and skills required for teaching staff working with autistic children and young people aged 5 to 16 years

National Standards 16–25 – which sets out key elements of good autism practice in settings for autistic children and young people aged 16 to 25 years

Competency Framework 16–25 which sets out knowledge and skills required for teaching staff working with autistic children and young people aged 16 to 25 years

AET Parent/Carers Guide: What to look for in your child's school: a document for parents/carers to complete identifying what they deem to be important for their autistic son or daughter – free to download from the AET website.

AET Tools for Teachers

AET Progression Framework – a means of recording progress specifically for autistic children and young people and for setting learning intentions.

The AET also has a number of **autism training hubs** in different parts of England which offer training on autism at different levels and for the different age phases (*i.e.* Early Years, 5 to 16 and 16 to 25 years) – see the AET website (<http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/>) for details of the training hub closest to you



Case Study G: Springfields School

School information	Sponsor led academy for 122 pupils aged 5 to19. Special school provision for SpLD (Specific Learning Difficulty), SLCN(Speech, language and Communication), Autism Spectrum, SEMH(Social, Emotional and Mental Health) and MLD (Moderate LearningDifficulty).
School website	www.springfields.wilts.sch.uk
Focus	Vocational Pathways at KS4 to Post 16 and beyond
Main themes	Pupil voice, vocational pathways at KS4
Principles illustrated	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understanding the strengths, interests and challenges of the autistic child and young person2. Enabling the voice of the autistic child and young person to contribute to and influence decisions7. Targeted support and measuring progress of children and young people on the autism spectrum8. Adapting the curriculum, teaching and learning to promote wellbeing and success for children and young people on the autismspectrum

The name used within this case study is not the real name of the pupil involved.

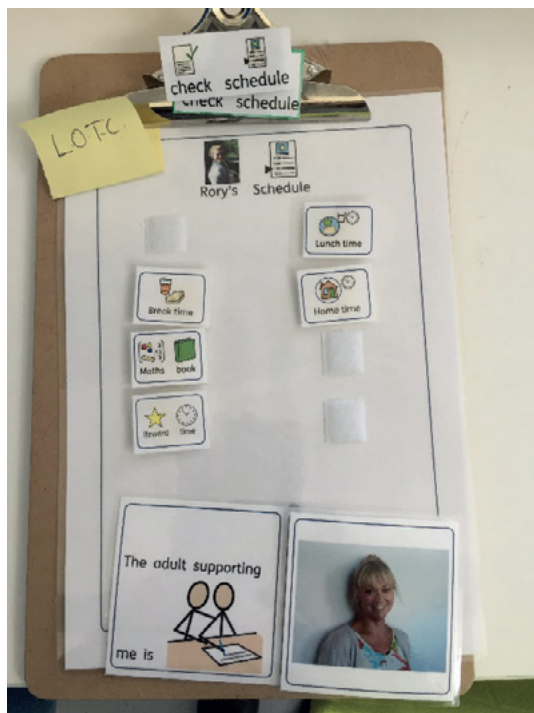
Context

The school is an independent specialist provision for pupils aged 5–16. In KS4, staff provide personalised pathways designed to enable pupils to reach their full potential in a safe and nurturing setting. Students gain qualifications and life skills in a calm, supportive and therapeutic environment enabling them to excel both academically and socially.



Understanding the individual with autism

P1 – Understanding the strengths, interests and challenges of the autistic child and young person



Fortnightly learning walks are undertaken by staff to monitor provision. There is a focused work scrutiny termly to monitor evidence of personalised strategies to enable students to achieve their outcomes independently and to support students to be engaged with their learning. The SENCo also holds termly meetings for teachers to discuss the needs of individual students and ensure understanding is developed across the staff team.

Young people have their own personalised work desk in the school. There are 5-point scales (outlined in the book *The Incredible 5-point Scale* by Kari Dunn Buron and Mitzi Curtis in 2003) to develop self-regulation and personalised strategies their desks for students to refer to. Scales are individual and allow students to identify whether they are working, whether they need five minutes or whether they need

time outside the room. Other scales allow students to identify whether they are working independently or need help. Children also have their own visual timetable. For some students this might just have now and next and for others, it might cover the whole day.

There are also learning support resources on desks including a checklist to develop independence and personal schedules also include who is supporting a child as well as a task list so that items can be moved from left to right when completed.

P2 – Enabling the voice of the autistic child and young person to contribute to and influence decisions

The school is currently piloting a research based three-pronged approach to capturing the autistic voice. This includes:

- **Wall-wisher** – a visual bulletin board where pupils post a message on one of three boards. Board topics could be around questions such as: What do you enjoy? What makes you take part in lessons/activities? How important is your relationship with your teacher?
- **Mosaic approach** – this is based on the assumption that ‘children are the experts in their own lives’ – a scrapbook might capture the perspectives of learning experiences by using artistic media of the pupils’ choice, (i.e. narrative, pictures, poems, photos, diary).
- **Secret Box** – concrete or virtual – students post their perspectives about teaching, learning and care in the box anonymously. This method does not require interaction.

The school is also developing a KS4-specific system of capturing accurate pupil voice that has a positive effect on individual outcomes. Pupils meet weekly with a trusted member of



staff to be mentored and to have an opportunity to share their views and opinions. Staff feel that the impact of this is that the students feel listened to, they feel proud of their school and develop a sense of belonging. The students' ideas are then presented to staff who have a discussion about how they might act on some of the issues mentioned.

Learning and development

P7 – Targeted support and measuring progress of children and young people on the autism spectrum.

Staff hold termly meetings to discuss the breadth of the curriculum, conduct audits around staff expertise, receive feedback around current pathways and look for opportunities to increase pathway options. Students in KS4 have an active transition plan which includes personalised strategy suggestions for teaching and learning.

Student passports are based around the Department for Education (DfE), *Preparation for Adulthood* (DfE, 21 February 2017) and include the headings Employment, Independent Living, Community Inclusion, Health, and Academic. The school works towards the achievement of academic outcomes and also outcomes on the preparation for adulthood in line with their developmental ability. Students are placed in an appropriate Post-16 Provision that aims to engage and inspire them and support them to fulfil their aspirations.

P8 – Adapting the curriculum, teaching and learning to promote wellbeing and success for autistic children and young people

The specialist Key Stage 4 curriculum is based on five key principles:

- Personalisation and choice
- Challenge and enjoyment
- Breadth and depth
- Progression and outcomes
- Collaboration.

The school has created 6 vocational pathways that students can follow at KS3/4 in Years 9, 10 and 11. There are currently 57 pupils in KS4. There are just four girls and 89% of the students are autistic. All pupils make a choice in Year 8 about which pathway they will follow and then spend ten hours a week doing this. The aim of personalised pathways is to provide bespoke support to enable autistic young people to access further education and training beyond school age, ultimately enabling them to transition to life and work as part of their local community. The current pathway choices are:

- Engineering and transport
- Hospitality and catering
- Outside learning
- Business and enterprise
- Sports and leisure
- Hair and beauty.



How personalised pathways projects work for Post-16 students at Springfields

Partnerships were established with local businesses and relevant agencies with the shared aim of improving transition to Further Education or work placements. Parents of those involved were provided with information about the project and confirmed their willingness for their son or daughter to take part.

On the Engineering and Transport pathway, a pupil would gain an IMI (Institute of Motor Industry) Level 1 qualification. The school has a fully functioning garage that the students work in with staff. Depending on their cognitive ability, they might then follow this pathway through to study at a Post-16 provision, for example at the local college.

The Outdoor Learning pathway sits alongside their core subjects of English, Maths and Science. Students study for a range of qualifications such as the Duke of Edinburgh Silver Award, a First Aid qualification, BTEC Outdoor Learning 1 and a Paddleboard Qualification.

On the Hair and Beauty pathway, students study for a City & Guilds in Hair & Beauty, various diplomas and certificates in Hairdressing and Make-up and Gateway qualifications, alongside their core subjects. The school has a fully functioning hair and beauty salon on site. The hair salon gives young people a real taste of what the work involves and supports them to build independence in that environment. Students go on to gain placements and apprenticeships giving them real work experience.



Visuals are used throughout to develop independence and provide prompts.

The school has good partnership and transition arrangements with the local Post-16 College which offers a range of vocational facilities for students. If the student is studying for GCSEs, they still have the opportunity to follow some of the vocational pathway activities tailored to their interests.

The pathways are staffed mainly by teachers already working at the school. In the Outdoor Learning pathway, a qualified PE teacher works with the students. One teacher used to be a head chef in the RAF and she now teaches on the Catering pathway. Some teachers come into school to fill in the gaps in skills. When employing new teachers, the school carefully considers how they might fit into their vocational pathways approach and where the gaps in skills exist.



Students learn life skills when they are following the pathways. They are prepared for adulthood and learn how to be employable, healthy and independent. School staff say students are happiest to learn when they are following a pathway – they are very motivated. There are high levels of engagement, for example, during learning on survival skills in the woods for the outdoor Learning pathway.

Students say that they love the pathways and enjoy all the experience they have through the vocational activities. Choosing to do something the students enjoy promotes engagement and gives greater breadth and depth to their education. The most popular pathways are Outdoor Learning, Engineering and Transport, and Business and Enterprise which includes Computing and ICT. The school is also hoping to introduce a Childcare pathway next year.

Eighty-eight per cent of the pupils are on track to meet their targets on the pathway they have chosen. The impact will be measured over time as this has only been in place over this academic year.

Parents are very pleased with the pathways approach as they are keen for their child to be engaged in learning and then to go on to meaningful employment.

Engineering and Transport Pathway Example

As autistic young people are likely to be visual learners, the following methods are employed to support their engagement in the motor vehicles' course:

- Use of graphics to help students to express their views
- Use of smart phones to take photographs and make videos
- Viewing platforms such as YouTube to demonstrate skills and processes, capture and share information with each other
- Making a visual tour of the motor vehicles workshop using a graphic design program.

Case Study of a student on the Engineering and Transport Pathway



Ben is a 17-year-old student with autism. He has had an interest in vehicles of all types since he was 5 years old. Ben wanted a career as a racing driver and liked to spend time at car rallies and shows with his father. His aspiration was to own and race his own car. Ben wanted to learn how cars worked and enjoyed taking car engines apart with his father at the weekends. It was therefore a natural progression for him to take part in this pathway.

During the project, Ben had some anxiety about timetable changes and not completing work on time. These anxieties were addressed by course tutors. They helped Ben put together visual work schedules and timetables so that he could see the order of the work to be done and when each stage would be completed with specific days and dates. This reduced Ben's anxiety considerably and he was able to use these strategies to work on other work.



Ben was able to spend time working in a garage environment on an area of interest for him.

Pathways Challenges and Positive Outcomes

Challenges

- Finding ways to listen to students and to secure their active involvement
- Making decisions about future work and progression
- Matching students to the appropriate pathway and sustaining progress
- Enabling students to communicate their needs and aspirations as they had difficulty imagining a future they had yet to experience
- Being prepared for autistic students to be open and direct with their views and dealing with this sensitively.

Positive Outcomes

- Building positive partnerships with providers, parents and other students
- Developing skills, knowledge, confidence in their area of interest
- Using person-centred ways of working
- Developing curriculum pathways and services to support transition and progression
- Building a shared understanding about the young person's aspirations and support needs.

Transferable practice – actions you could try in your setting

- Student voice – use the three part approach – well-wisher, mosaic and secret box to encourage student voice in different ways and in a variety of environments across the setting
- Consider how your setting can support young people to develop vocational skills which match their profile and interests to support transition into further education or employment
- Consider how your setting enables students to develop the skills required in adulthood (e.g., self-care; cooking; domestic tasks; budgeting)
- Use the DfE *Preparation for Adulthood* guidance (DfE, 21 February 2017) to inform development of student passports.



References

Buron, KD and Curtis, M (2012) *The incredible 5-Point Scale* (2nd. Edition) AAPC publishing

Department for Education (2017) *Preparation for adulthood*, London: DfE

Further resources

Autism Education Trust (<http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/>)

National Standards for Schools 5–16 which sets out key elements of good autism practice in settings for autistic children and young people aged 5 to 16 years

Competency Framework for Staff 5–16 which sets out knowledge and skills required for teaching staff working with autistic children and young people aged 5 to 16 years

National Standards 16–25 which sets out key elements of good autism practice in settings for autistic children and young people aged 16 to 25 years

Competency Framework 16–25 which sets out knowledge and skills required for teaching staff working with autistic children and young people aged 16 to 25 years

AET Parent/Carers Guide: What to look for in your child's school: a document for parents/carers to complete identifying what they deem to be important for their autistic son or daughter – free to download from the AET website.

AET Tools for Teachers

AET Progression Framework – a means of recording progress specifically for autistic children and young people and for setting learning intentions.

The AET also has a number of **autism training hubs** in different parts of England which offer training on autism at different levels and for the different age phases (*i.e.* Early Years, 5 to 16 and 16 to 25 years) – see the AET website (<http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/>) for details of the training hub closest to you



Case Study H: St. John the Baptist Church of England Primary School

School information	Primary school in the North East of England
School's website	st-johnthebaptist.org.uk
Number on roll	249
Age range	3 to 11 years
Focus of the case study	Early Years: Inclusion of a nursery child with autism. Impact of the AET training on practice
Principles illustrated	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understanding the strengths, interests and challenges of the autistic child and young person3. Collaboration with parents and carers of autistic children and young people4. Workforce development to support autistic children and young people6. An ethos and environment that fosters social inclusion for children and young people on the autism spectrum8. Adapting the curriculum, teaching and learning to promote wellbeing and success for autistic children and young people

Context

John (fictitious name) was 4 years old in November 2018 and on the waiting list for a diagnosis of autism. He is preverbal and has an older brother (13) who is autistic. He has a sister in Year 5 at the school. The teacher has known John's family over many years and wanted to prepare John for attending the nursery. His parents were keen for John to attend mainstream school and were open to any suggestions and advice.

The nursery teacher attended the AET training on autism to prepare for working with John. She implemented a number of actions as a consequence of the training and John started to attend the nursery on a graduated basis. The AET training team supported the teacher through this process.



Understanding the individual with autism

P1 – Understanding the strengths, interests and challenges of the autistic child and young person

The teacher noted that there were parts of the nursery environment John did not use (e.g. the non-carpeted area of the classroom). He appeared to be interested in the activities

in the non-carpeted area, as he would point to things within it. She lowered some of the play equipment such as the sand tray and John entered the area to play with this. He did not use the water bath so the teacher replaced the water in the bath with a blue silky fabric and put the boats on top of this. He then played with the boats and once he was familiar with using the bath, she replaced the fabric with water.

Positive and effective relationships

P3 – Collaboration with parents and carers of autistic children and young people

The nursery teacher was clear about the *'need to build a relationship with John's family as the parents are the child's first teachers'*. She established a close relationship inviting his mother into the classroom to support John. She was honest with his mother about her limited knowledge of autism and explained that she was attending autism training to be in a better position to help.

Before John started school, the nursery teacher made a home visit at 10 am every Monday morning with resources. At first, John did not want to engage with her. However, eventually he did allow her to play with him and she read him a story. This built up to sessions lasting about 30 minutes.

John was transitioned into the nursery very gradually in stages.

At first, his mother would just bring John into the school grounds and then take him home.

Then she started bringing John into the nursery porch.

After two weeks, John was able to come into the nursery room and sit on the carpet with his mother for 10 to 15 minutes before going home.

This time was gradually extended and after 11 months, he was able to stay at the nursery without his mother.

The nursery teacher worked slowly to increase expectations and remove barriers to John's learning. Initially, he did not want to wear a waterproof and wellington boots when outside. The teacher sent these home to familiarise him with these and now he will wear them at school for a short period.

The nursery teacher uses a learning journal to share information with his mother, as well as a Marvellous Me app (www.marvellousme.com)

As a result of this careful planning and the transition activities, John is starting to initiate activities and take adults to where he wants to go. He points and babbles and tries to communicate his needs. He joins in with the class singing when he knows the tune. The adjustments the teacher has made have led to clear progress in his skills and ability to enjoy and access the nursery activities. His mother is now only at the nursery to drop him off and collect him. The teacher feels that her relationship with his mother is key and that his mother trusts her judgement.



P4 – Workforce development to support autistic children and young people

The nursery teacher's professional development journey began with an email invitation to a conference run by the AET training team. Two teachers from the school attended this in April 2018 where Ros Blackburn, an autistic adult, spoke and took from this, *'have the same expectations of an autistic child as you would for every other child'* but make adjustments to enable the child to be successful. Following the conference, the teacher then completed the AET Training Tiers 1 and 3, and put things in place as a result of the training. The teacher developed an ongoing link with the AET training team for support and advice.

The teacher found it useful that the training was attended by a range of providers who could share their experiences (e.g. child minders, private daycare, primary, and 1:1 support workers). She feels that the materials were really clear and that having real case studies made it more accessible. She found the videos on the AET training really useful and these informed what she did in her own classroom. She also found the discussion and sharing ideas really useful and has benefitted from regular discussions with AET staff *'who are so knowledgeable'*. The teacher commented that staff *'often go on courses that mean nothing and she went on this and it was a light bulb moment'*. She said it inspired her to find out that small changes she could make straight away could make a big difference to a child.

The SENCo created time for the nursery teacher to attend training and encouraged her as a leader. The nursery teacher led on meetings with John's parents which made her feel really valued. The school SENCo and other teachers now come to her for advice about autistic children elsewhere in the school.

The nursery teacher has also presented to a whole school staff meeting to spread the practice through the school. The SENCo has seen the impact in class of what the teacher has put in place.

As a result of her interest, inspired by the AET training, the nursery teacher has now begun a course to gain a Level 3 qualification in Early Years Inclusive Practice.

Enabling environments

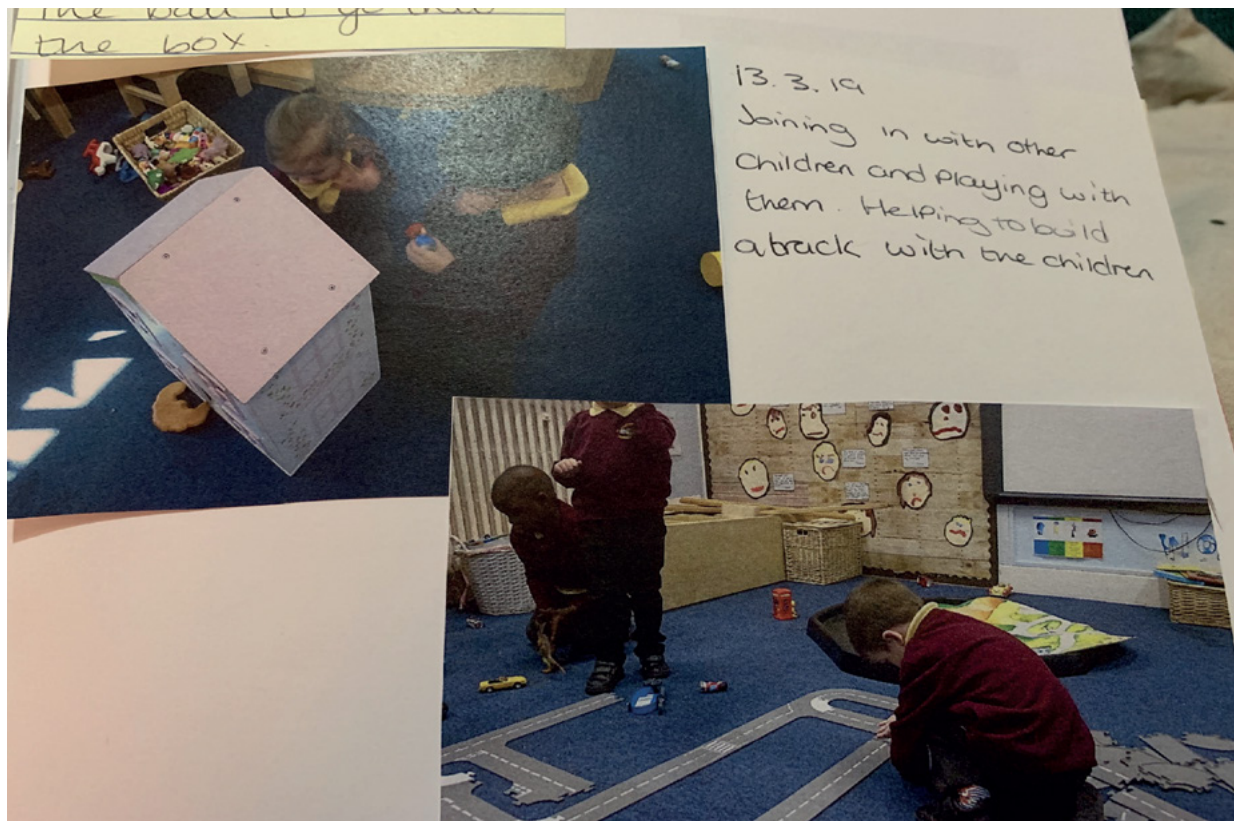
P6 – An ethos and environment that fosters social inclusion for children and young people on the autism spectrum

The teacher adjusted the environment to meet John's physical and sensory needs. He would point to the 'sticking' table but would not go there to access the resources and make a picture. The teacher then took away all the resources that had been on the table and replaced these with familiar things that John liked (e.g. his favourite jigsaw and book). John then began to use the area to play with these. The teacher then added paper and pens to the area.

Another example of the impact of the AET training was around social inclusion and working with other children. Initially, the teacher arranged for John to play a game with a group of his own friends. She then followed this up by including another child who was not part of his friendship group. Over time, she gradually rotated the groupings so that different children replaced friends within the group to build John's social skills and to familiarise other children with John. As a result John's interactions with his peers have improved. He



can now regularly be seen helping another little girl with SEN at snack time by passing her a cup. When he is building with blocks, he now passes blocks to his partner. Other children are modelling language, asking John things like, 'Shall we build it higher?' and using actions to demonstrate this as they have seen adults do so when working with John. John is now more included in classroom activities and is communicating with other children.



Learning and development

P8 – Adapting the curriculum, teaching and learning to promote wellbeing and success for autistic children and young people

The teacher believes her priorities are on skills such as turn-taking and developing interactions with peers. One of the key skills she has focused on is for John to wait and take turns. She uses his name to cue him in. He will now wait and point and attempt to say the place he wants to go.

She repeats useful phrases to help develop his verbal and communication skills and, as a result, these are beginning to develop. Recently, he gave the milk out to everyone in the circle. Every child said, 'Thank you John' and he smiled in acknowledgement. When she takes the register he now smiles and attempts to say 'Morning'. He can recognise colours and is beginning to name these.

Plans are already in place to transition John into the Reception class, starting with visits with his teacher to join in story time.



Transferable practice – actions you could try in your setting

- Use familiar and favourite items to encourage children to use classroom areas and equipment they are not making use of.
- Change the physical level of activities so that they are lower to the ground and easier to access.
- Gradually change the social groupings of the children so they can play with familiar children but also with others to develop their social interaction.
- Send items home so that autistic children can use these in a familiar environment
- Plan carefully for any transition and allow as much time as is needed for the child to feel comfortable
- Invite parents in to support their child in the classroom.
- Explain your approach in detail to parents so that they understand and can work in partnership.
- Involve parents in training events and invite them to share their ideas and strategies.

Further resources

Marvellous Me app (<http://www.marvellousme.com>)

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