Saint Joseph's Primary School and Nursery Unit
Bessbrook

Policy for the Teaching and Learning of Children with ASD

Sept 2020

Outline of Policy

• School Development Plan
• Definition of ASD
• Underlying Values and Principles
• Aims of ASD provision
• Objectives

School's Development Plan

We aim to achieve this by:

o Providing a safe and caring environment which is supportive of a child with autism, by raising awareness among all staff and to become an autism friendly school.

o Creating a stimulating learning environment in which all children will enjoy a wide range of experiences to develop their full potential, through a highly structured programme based on educational targets and strategies for intervention.

o Working in partnership with families and external agencies to develop good links with parents and other support agencies.

o Developing our knowledge and understanding of autism through continuous training to help meet the needs of children with an ASD.

St. Joseph's Primary School and Nursery Unit policy for autism should be read in the context of the wider school plan and the school's vision for all pupils.
(See Action Plans in the appendix.)

Autistic Spectrum Disorder: Definition

• The Report of the Task Group (DENI, 2002) states that autism *"is a complex developmental disability that essentially affects the way a person communicates and relates to people"*.

• ASD is a behaviourally defined disorder, characterised by qualitative impairments in social communication, social interaction and social imagination, with a restricted range of interests and often stereotyped repetitive behaviours and mannerisms.

• These characteristics correspond to a 'Dyad of Impairments' as outlined in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual-5 since May 2013

1.   Social and communication deficits are now regarded as one, not two, because they have been deemed inseparable.

2.   Fixated interests and repetitive behaviours will include unusual sensory behaviours.

• The term "Autistic Spectrum Disorder" (ASD) is now used, reflecting the fact that the condition exists on a continuum and greatly varies from person to person (DENI, 2002).

Underlying Values and Principles: from '*Evaluating Provision for Autistic Spectrum Disorder in Schools*' (DENI, 2005)

1.   Children and young people with autism are children and young people first.

2.   Children and young people with autism have a right of access to education services that best suit their needs.

3. Learners with autism have a right to a programme designed to meet their unique needs and provide access to the curriculum of their peers.

(DENI, 2005)
Teachers, allied professionals and learning assistants should have an appropriate
  • knowledge of autism,
  • knowledge of the holistic needs of each child,
  • knowledge of the impact of each child's autism on his/her learning
  • knowledge of each child's autism on his/her ability to interact/socialise

St. Joseph's Primary School and Nursery Unit also has regard to the 7 principles recommended by the Task Group Report to underpin planning of provision. These are that provision should be:

1. based on current research indicating best practice in respect of achieving meaningful outcomes, providing value for input of time and resources, and promoting independence and inclusion;

2. inclusive of a range of methods and approaches which have been shown to be effective or which are judged by those who work with children with ASD to be worthy of evaluation;

3. determined by, and regularly reviewed by, multi-disciplinary, multi-agency teams which include parents as well as appropriately trained professionals from the Education Authority (EA) and Health and Social Service Boards (SSBs), and which respond promptly to requests for assessment and intervention;

4. reflective of the individual's needs profile, and any changes in these needs over time and across different contexts and reflective of the needs of the family;

5. compatible with the Department of Education's guidelines on pastoral care, including child protection (Circular 1999/10) and the United Nations Convention on Human Rights (Article 4)

6. provided by appropriately trained professionals.

7. subject to review, evaluation and inspection by the Education and Training Inspectorate.

(Report of the Task Group on Autism, DENI, 2002)

Aims

St. Joseph's Primary School and Nursery Unit aims to:

1. Provide a supportive class and school environment
2. Raise awareness of ASD throughout the school
3. Develop learning, social, communication, play and behaviour competencies in children with ASD
4. Develop each child's independence skills to the greatest extent possible
5. Promote inclusive practice
6. Facilitate collaborative working with parents and professionals

Objectives

To achieve these aims the school will:

1. Create an autism friendly environment

2. Ensure staff training is comprehensive and on-going

3. Ensure that children have access NI Curriculum

4. Establish effective assessment and monitoring arrangements

5. Support each child to integrate at an appropriate and meaningful level with his/her peers

6. Provide opportunities for parents to work closely with the school

7. Provide for multi-agency collaborative working

8. Prepare and plan for transition

1. Creation of an autism friendly classroom and school environment

'The school maintains an appropriate environment designed to reflect the learning needs, and support the social inclusion of children with an ASD' (DENI, 2005 p 4).
'Intervention should focus on the development of strategies which structure the environment to provide the child with a sense of security conducive to learning appropriate behaviours in a range of settings' (DENI, 2002).

The school maintains an appropriate environment, designed to optimise the safety, security, learning and behaviour objectives for the children with ASD. Particular attention is given to the following:

Sensory Environment

'Teachers and others should understand the sensory difficulties which children may experience as a consequence of ASD and set appropriate targets to address each child's sensory needs' (DENI, 2005)

To address the sensory and perceptual sensitivities of children with ASD staff:

• examine the flexible use of space, lighting (e.g. use of filters or dimmer switches), texture (e.g. floor covering, wall displays), sounds (e.g. location of bell), smells (location of dining hall), heating and ventilation systems (e.g. adjustable temperatures), use of patterns and colouring (e.g. on floors, walls, displays and worktops)
• create a specific area, clearly differentiated from other activity areas, to fulfil sensory needs or for respite (e.g. sensory room, sensory equipment and sensory garden).

Structured Teaching

To maximise the cognitive strengths of each child staff:

• make use of each child's response to structure and routine
• provide for a range of structures and systems in accordance with individual needs
• recognise that some children with ASD require additional or alternative strategies (e.g. auditory strategies).

Where appropriate the school will provide for the following structure:

Physical Structure. This includes provision for:
Clearly defined areas for activities including group work, play/leisure, and transition.

• Daily activities which are consistently associated with specific areas of the room.
• Utilisation of materials and furniture so that boundaries are clear.
• Individual workstations for children who need them

• Materials, schedules and communication systems which are easily accessible to the children.

Work Systems

This includes provision for:
• Work areas which are designed and individually tailored to help children complete tasks independently.
• Systems that communicate the following information to the child:
– 'what do I have to do?'
– 'how much do I do?'
– 'what do I do when finished?'
– 'what happens next?'

Visual Schedules

• For many children schedules will be used to help overcome difficulties in planning and organisation.
• The schedule visually tells the children what activities will occur and in what sequence.
• The schedules will vary in complexity and detail depending on the child's age, ability and need.
• Typically a schedule may be represented by one of the following:
– Object/Object sequence
– Line drawing and word on strip
– Checklists (picture & word or word only)
– Reference only daily timetable
– Weekly timetable
– Written Schedule
    • For children who are unable to follow a visual schedule, an option which is more appropriate to the individual child's learning will be consider (eg choice board, single symbol approach)

Dealing with Change

• Preparing children for the possibility of change, as well as the procedures that will be followed when change occurs, are important components in the physical classroom design.
• Change and transition throughout the day are seen as an integral part of each child's daily schedule (e.g. using a visual cue to highlight change).

Staff-Pupil Ratio

The school will ensure appropriate levels of staffing to meet the needs of each child, where
• Staffing will depend on the needs of individual children
• Teaching will include direct one-on-one as well as small group working arrangements

• Efforts will be made to avoid the possibility of a child becoming overly prompt-dependent and ensure greater opportunities for independent learning and development of problem solving skills.

A schedule checklist and schedule change checklist is used to record the changes in a child's schedule and work station. (Appendix 1).

A prompting checklist may also be used. (Appendix 2)

Workstation/work system checklist (Appendix 3)

(All to be evaluated by staff at the end of each school year or as needed)

Classroom Assistants

The classroom assistants make a very valuable contribution to the ASD classroom team.
They implement all teaching methods under the direction of the teacher.
They carry out the following activities:

- Group/1:1 work
- Facilitating integration in the playground
- Take charge of play activities
- Help to create the necessary resources and plans
- Implement behaviour management plans
- Assist with the review of the pupil's progress
- Carry out any other activities at the discretion of the teacher and as the needs arise.

2. Training of Staff

'The staff of the school demonstrates an appropriate understanding of ASD and have sufficient expertise to meet the needs of children with an ASD' (DENI, 2005 p7).

The school is committed to ensuring that staff take up appropriate and relevant training in relation to understanding and meeting the needs of children with ASD. Teachers are responsible for keeping records of staff training and of the impact of training on planning for teaching and learning.

Core competencies will be developed through the following:

- INSET
- Whole school training
- Specific training e.g.
  - Application of the Principles of Behaviour Analysis
  - Sensory Difficulties in ASD
  - Health Awareness Training
  - Primary Movement
  - Numicon
  - Behaviour training.
  - Working with children with special needs (Level 3, Newry Tech)
  - Working with and supporting children and young people with special needs. (Level 3 Newry Tech)
  - Understanding how to support individuals with Autism Specific Conditions. (Level 3 Newry Tech)
  - Understand the Speech, language and communication needs of children and young people with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. (Level 3, Newry Tech)
  - Autism Communication (Middletown)
  - Autism and visual methodologies. (Middletown)
  - Autism and sensory processing (Middletown)
  - Autism and transitions. (Middletown)
  - Autism and anxiety management. (Middletown)
  - Autism and the promotion of positive behaviour. (Middletown)
  - Attention Autism. (Middletown) School referral.
  - SCERTs training.
  - Building Capacity Conference 2017

- Training in 'Treatment and Education for Autism and Communication Handicapped Children' (TEACCH).
- Reading and Research
- PRSD (teachers)
- Cluster group meetings (ASD)
- Training and advice sought from Middletown Autism Centre and the Autism Advisory Service AAIS

3. Assessment and Monitoring Arrangements

'The needs of the child with ASD should be comprehensively and systematically assessed so that teaching can be matched to their needs' (DENI, 2005 p10).
'The learning strengths and weaknesses of children and young people should be identified to ensure effective differentiation of provision' (DENI, 2002)

- Staff discuss and agree procedures for assessing, recording and reviewing progress.

- Assessment and monitoring take a number of forms. These include initial observations as well as observations over time, direct measurement, data collection (e.g. from behaviour ABC charts) as well as qualitative data. In some instances quantitative measurement is more appropriate. At other times qualitative monitoring will be more appropriate e.g. interview, ratings, logs, samples of work, photographic/video records.
- Following a six week observation period staff may consult with the Autism Advisory and Intervention Service in putting appropriate autism-specific assessment procedures in place e.g. PEP-3.

- Each child's assessment results can be found in the PEP's folder, SCERTS folder and general assessment folder.

IEP/PLP

• Staff use the information from assessments to inform each child's Education Plan (EP) which is the main assessment and monitoring tool.

• The Education Plan (EP) is the basis for developing an inventory of a child's skills, difficulties and individual learning style. The Education Plan assists the teaching process, choice of methods and monitoring arrangements.

4. The Curriculum

'*The organisation of the curriculum is sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of children with autism'* (DENI, 2005)

'Social skills training should be provided as an essential element of intervention programmes for children and young people with ASD' (DENI, 2002)

'Intervention programmes should address the issues of anxiety and stress as a normal consequence of ASD' (DENI, 2002)

• Access to the Northern Ireland Curriculum is carefully planned, supported and differentiated in accordance with each child's individual assessed strengths and needs.

• Each child's ability and interests are recognised, valued and encouraged through the curriculum and its provision. Additional curriculum features may be required to address the wide range of abilities and impairments found in children with ASD.

• There is a curriculum emphasis on developing communication, social interaction, imagination and flexibility of thought and behaviour.

• Programme elements are adapted and reviewed as a function of each child's age and level of development.

Curriculum Support Strategies

'The Task Group finds preference for no single approach but considers that single methods by themselves may not address effectively the dyad of impairments associated with ASD. The Group considers that intervention programmes should be child centered rather than method centered and should address the observed and unique needs of the child and any variation in these which occurs over time and across settings and situations' (DENI,2002).

A variety of educational and therapeutic techniques are considered to assist and support each child with ASD at all levels of functioning. A combined-skills based approach is preferred. This includes the use of behavioural, communicative, social-learning and interactive based strategies. The weighting given to any approach is tailored to the particular needs of a child and may include any or all of the following:

- Structured Teaching taken from the TEACCH Model.
- Application of Principles of Applied Behaviour Analysis
- Application of Social Communication, Emotional Regulation and Transactional Support (SCERTS) model.
- Sensory Play and awareness
- Art therapy through Jumping Clay
- Music Therapy
- Horse riding Therapy (from Primary 2 if appropriate)
- Relax Kids Therapy
- Attention Autism.
- Speech Therapy
- Occupational Therapy.
- Visual Communication Systems
- Social Learning Approaches (Social Stories)
- Use of ICT

1. **Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH)**
   The application of TEACCH principles of structured teaching and organisation is a core part of the classroom through organisation of the physical environment, development of schedules and work systems, making expectations clear and explicit, and using visual materials as learning aids. TEACCH training programme is undertaken by all staff.

2. **Applied behaviour Analysis (ABA)** Behavioural principles underpin much of the teaching approach. Behaviour analysis employs the teaching principle that learning occurs in discrete and measurable segments and that rewards can influence learning. The teaching of new learning is characterised by clarity and directedness using task analysed skills sequences, prompting, modelling, positive contingent reinforcement and functional assessment.

3. **SCERTS** The SCERTS Model is a research-based educational approach and multidisciplinary framework that directly addresses the core challenges faced by children and persons with ASD and related disabilities, and their families. SCERTS focuses on building competence in Social Communication, Emotional Regulation and Transactional Support as the highest priorities that must be addressed in any program, and is applicable for individuals with a wide range of abilities and ages across home, school and community settings

4. **Sensory play and awareness.** This is a developmentally based approach which uses play to establish a relationship with the child through spontaneous communication, mutual engagement and enjoyment. It is entirely a child-focused programme that recognises the benefits of sensory play as essential for learning, communication and development. Staff have an understanding of sensory issues surrounding ASD.

5. **Art therapy through Jumping Clay** is a stimulating process encapsulating all the senses. 'Learning by doing" or "experiential learning" helps to reinforce a child's development and education. It helps great students to achieve more and struggling learners to master more complex concepts.

6. **Music Therapy** Music therapy is a well-established professional health discipline that uses music as the therapeutic stimulus to achieve non-musical treatment goals. Research supports connections between speech and singing, rhythm and motor behaviour, memory for song and memory for academic material, and overall ability of preferred music to enhance mood, attention, and behaviour to optimize the student's ability to learn and interact.

7. **Horse riding therapy** Children with autism benefit from equine therapy due to the motor, emotional, and sensory sensations that come with riding a horse. The benefits of equine therapy include Relaxing tight muscles: building muscle strength, improving fine motor coordination, sharpening hand/eye coordination, improvements

in Posture & Flexibility, improving Communication (improving one's ability to breathe makes it easier for a person to speak) Gaining self-control and self-confidence, gaining self-confidence, improving concentration, improving concentration (especially for those who have difficulty staying on task with activities) improving socialization (Aspen, 2011)

8. **Relax Kids Therapy** Relax Kids therapy can help improve concentration and focus, improve sleep, hep develop creativity and imagination, build confidence and self-esteem, build emotional resilience, develop self-regulation of emotions, improve listening skills and increase brain power.

9. **Attention Autism** aims to develop natural and spontaneous communication through the use of visually based and highly motivating activities. The programme aims to engage attention, improve joint attention, develop shared enjoyment in group activities, to increase attention in adult-led activities, encourage spontaneous interaction in a natural group setting, increase non-verbal and verbal communication through commenting and to build a wealth and depth of vocabulary

10. **Speech Therapy.** Speech therapy can address a wide range of communication problems for people with autism. Speech therapy can improve communication through enhancing children's ability to form relationships and function in day-to-day life.

11. **Occupational Therapy.** The aim of the Calm and Alert Programme is to prepare the children for the school day. Heavy work activities (i.e., proprioceptive input) are used for children with sensory processing difficulties to help increase attention, decrease defensiveness, and modulate arousal. Proprioceptive input is the performance of tasks that involves heavy resistance and input to the muscles and joints, and is essential in helping our bodies assimilate and process both movement (vestibular) and touch (tactile) information.

12. **Visual Communication Systems** include schedules, first/then cards, choice boards, change boards, emotions key rings, super symbols, countdown strip, help hand, PECs all of which aim to reduce anxiety levels for the child and make transitioning easier.

13. **Social Learning Approaches**: Social Stories and Comic Strip Conversations. *Social stories* utilising visual supports and narrative, assist in preparing a child for new or difficult situations. The stories are written in first person, include illustrations, and provide the perspective of a child with ASD. They are written at the child's comprehension level with a copy often provided for home use. Comic Strip Conversations incorporating simple line drawings, symbols and colour to illustrate relevant concepts in selected conversations, are used to give the child an insight into other perspectives of a situation and for younger or less able children they are an alternative to social stories.

14. **Use of ICT:** Use of the ICT to capture attention and to enhance the interactive nature of activities.

Staff may seek advice (from Autism Advisory and Intervention Service and Middletown Autism Centre) in drawing upon a range of teaching strategies to assist their work with individual children. Staff maintain flexibility in adapting for change in circumstances or new information.

5. Inclusion

The staff works to provide an "*atmosphere where the children with autism feel safe and secure and where the other children have an empathy with the children with autism*' (DENI, 2005)

• The school is committed to providing an inclusive social and learning environment.

• The school has taken up whole-school training to ensure cohesion and consistency of approach for children with ASD.   Peer training was also conducted with the AAIS with the P3 children in order to facilitate successful integration.

• Many of the strategies above assist the process of ensuring that each child is included in the life of the school to the greatest extent possible.

• The ASD classroom is an integral part of the school and allows planned and focused opportunities for children to learn and play along-side children who do not have special educational needs.

• Decisions on degree, type and occasion for integration is made by the teacher, in consultation with parents having regard to the child's Statement of Special Education Needs.

• The integration programme is monitored through Integration observations which take into account the targets from the child's EP (where appropriate). The integration experience is evaluated by class teacher and integration teacher on a termly basis.

6. Parental Communication and Involvement

The school seeks to ensure that parents are '*confident and supportive of the school's effectiveness on their child's behalf'* (DENI, 2005).

• Active parental participation in the learning and teaching of their child is encouraged in a range of ways, for example:
   o Direct consultation (e.g. for initial information, EP review, specific concerns or programme implementation)
   o Parent-Teacher meetings.
   o PEP Assessment feedback.

- A home-school diary
- Telephone contact
- Annual reviews
- School reports
- School events
- School text messaging service.

• Parents are kept fully informed of progress.

1. # Multi-disciplinary and Multi-agency Collaboration

"A multi-disciplinary approach to curriculum planning and implementation for children with ASD is critical" (DENI, 2002*).*

- The school recognises that the success of a child's learning and development depends on the workings of a team including parents.

- The school maintains good links with the Autism Advisory and Intervention Service and other board support services e.g. Advisory Service, Educational Psychology, Behaviour Management, Educational and Welfare, Clounagh Centre

- The school maintains good links with Health and Social Care Trusts (e.g. ADIS, Speech and Language Therapist, Occupational Therapists).

- The school maintains good links with the voluntary sector (e.g. Run for Autism HAND, RDA) and the local community so as to provide for the wider needs of children with autism beyond the school.

- Close liaison with Middletown Centre for Autism.

8. Transition

> *"appropriate transition arrangements are in place to effect the smooth transfer of children with autism to other schools or settings and information is transferred in advance of the placement"*(DENI, 2005)

- Children will be phased in initially to ensure a smooth transfer into the AS class.

- The school maintains links with the Autism Advisory and Intervention Service and other relevant support services to facilitate transition.

- Parents are fully included in the preparation, planning and achievement of a smooth transition for their child.

- The school has procedures in place to ensure that children with ASD can transfer with ease to other placements. In order to assist with transition from the AS class the children's day will be extended accordingly depending on each pupil's individual needs following educational psychology assessment for transfer review.

- Procedures to assist with transition are taken directly from the **Autism Specific Class Provision: A guideline for mainstream schools.**

References

- Evaluating Provision for Autistic Spectrum Disorder in Schools (DENI, 2005)

- Report of Task Group on Autism. (2002). *The education of children and young people with autistic spectrum disorders.* Belfast: Department of Education (April).

- http://www.dsm5.org/Documents/Autism%20Spectrum%20Disorder%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf

Appendix 1: Schedule Checklist

Objectives	Post around room on receiver cards	Post in all done finished pocket	Strike out/tick.	Check schedule (indicate how pupil does this)	Visual cue (indicate what is used)
Small line drawing And word: top to bottom.					
Written word schedule: top to bottom					
Timetable: 1 day displayed					
Timetable: 2 day displayed					
Timetable: week displayed					
Others _____					

Schedule change checklist

Objectives	Physical prompt	Verbal and point prompt	Verbal prompt	Independent
Tolerates change of schedule cue.				

Appendix 2: Prompting Schedule

Objectives	Achieved with physical prompt	Achieved with verbal and point prompt	Achieved with verbal prompt	Achieved independently (100%)
Morning routine				
Uses Break work system				
Uses Dinner work system				
Independent Work				
Toilet Routine				
Transition Routine				
Home time Routine				

Locating Baskets Checklist

Objective	Achieved with physical distance	Point prompt	Verbal prompt	Independently
Locates work baskets from left side of work station				
Travel from work station and locate 1 basket				
Travel from work station and locate 2 baskets				
Travel from work station and locate 3 baskets				
Travel from work station and locate 4 baskets				
Travel from work station and locate 5 baskets				

Appendix 3: Work Station checklist.

Objectives	Achieved with physical prompt	Verbal and point prompt	Verbal prompt	Independently
Work at station with 4 physical screens				
Work at station with 3 physical screens				
Work at station with 2 physical screens				
Work at station with 1 physical screens				
Work at table with no physical screens				
Work at table with one other children sitting nearby				
Work at table with more than one child.				

Work system checklist

Objectives	Achieved with physical distant	Point prompt	Verbal prompt	Independently
No work system, works from left to right, places finished basket in all done tray				
Works from left to right, follows object matching work system				
Works from left to right, follows symbol matching work system				
Works from left to right, follows written matching work system				
Follows daily work system, locates baskets.				