



Autistic Spectrum Policy

Created: October 2019

Renewal date: October 2022

Knockloughrim Primary School

Autistic Spectrum Policy

Meeting the Needs of Pupils on the Autistic Spectrum

1. Background

The autistic spectrum represents a range of conditions (from Asperger's Syndrome to Autism) characterised by difficulties in social interaction and by restricted or repetitive patterns of thought and behaviour. These developmental differences are pervasive, however difficulties experienced by those diagnosed as being on the spectrum can vary in severity. Current estimates state that approximately 3 in every 100 children now receive a formal diagnosis of autism. The numbers of pupils attending our school who are diagnosed with autism has risen and may well continue to rise in the foreseeable future.

Impact on the Learner of Being on the Autistic Spectrum

There are two types of difficulties/differences which are referred to when discussing the of impact on learning that comes from being on the autistic spectrum. In general terms they are:

- Difficulties with social communication - difficulties with body language and verbal communication, reciprocal conversation, emotional and social reciprocity and managing structured parts of the day.
- Restricted interest and repetitive behaviours - difficulty with changes in routine, repetitive behaviours and rituals.

These are known as 'The Dyad of Impairments'.

Another recognised core feature may be unusual sensory responses including over or under sensitivity to particular lights, sounds, tastes, touch or movements.

This policy has been written to supplement other current policies in the school and should be considered alongside the existing policies and documents already in place particularly the school's SEN Policy.

2. Aims

Knockloughrim Primary School aims to meet the needs of its pupils' on the autistic spectrum by:

- Offering a variety of consistent, high quality provision.
- Ensuring that staff have access to CPD and support.
- Collaborating with relevant professionals and parents / carers.
- Planning to address the individual and specific needs of pupils on the spectrum.
- Delivering a curriculum which balances social and academic need.

3. Provision

Teaching and Learning

A good learning environment for pupils with a diagnosis of autism includes:

- Access to up to date profile information.
- On-going assessment on an informal observation basis.
- The application of individualised visual structures and amendment to the physical environment where appropriate.
- The provision of a structured environment, which will support pupils' sensory and emotional regulation.
- Consistent communication with home and outside agencies, where applicable.
- Classroom Assistants, while supporting the individual, recognise the need to promote independence.

Social Communication Skills

Children on the autistic spectrum present with difficulties in areas of social and communication skills. Strategies to assist these pupils include:

- Use of schedules and activity systems.
- Key Stage 1 Attention Autism Group.
- Key Stage 2 Social Skills Group.

Sensory and Emotional Regulation

- The overall school ethos continues to provide a safe, caring environment for all pupils.
- Staff need to be in tune with sensory needs and, facilitate individualised sensory regulation strategies. For example, use of the 'Calm Zone' and visual strategies within the classroom.

4. Staffing

Each class is led by a classroom teacher. Additionally, Knockloughrim PS also benefits from a high level of support from classroom assistants.

At Knockloughrim PS we believe that pupils' independence should be promoted wherever possible. Pupils on the autistic spectrum will have the opportunity to work in small groups.

5. Learning Environments

An organised and well planned learning environment is essential for the holistic development of pupils on the autistic spectrum. All learning environments within Knockloughrim PS will therefore provide:

- A high level of visual support.
- The necessary amount of structure to address the needs of pupils with autism in each class.
- Low arousal environments where necessary.

6. Curriculum

The curriculum is designed to be broad and balanced taking into account the social and academic needs of pupils on the autistic spectrum. The overall curriculum delivered at Knockloughrim PS includes opportunities to address the following:

- Communication
- Interaction
- Flexibility of thought
- Sensory sensitivity.

8. Behaviour

All staff and pupils are guided by the policy for the promotion of positive behaviour. Visual and communication strategies assist with the implementation of this policy.

The impact of being on the autistic spectrum on pupils may cause high levels of frustration and/or anxiety resulting in challenging behaviour which presents as a barrier to their learning. At Knockloughrim PS we acknowledge that the following basic principles of good autism practice can reduce the incidence of such behaviour:

- Ensuring all staff have an awareness of the strengths and difficulties associated with autism.
- Providing a structured and consistent approach which enhances predictability.
- Supporting pupils' communication in order to reduce frustration.

- An understanding that social interaction can place additional demands on pupils over and above academic learning intentions.
- Addressing sensory needs throughout the day helps pupils to remain calm and focused.

Methods employed to help pupils include:

- Stress ball and fidget toys
- Deep breathing
- Progressive muscle relaxation (tensing and relaxing parts of the body, fists, arms, legs, and whole body in sequence)
- 'Take Ten'.

9. Continued Professional Development for Staff

All staff have a range of CPD opportunities to enhance their understanding of autism and to develop their autistic spectrum practice. Autism specific CPD is delivered through the Education Authority (Autism Support and Intervention Service) and Middletown Centre for Autism. Middletown Centre for Autism delivered a series of trainings to the staff at Knockloughrim PS in 2018. These training sessions were available to both parents and professionals providing an opportunity for the whole community to access autism training.

10. Collaboration

Autism can be a complex and challenging condition therefore we recognise the need to collaborate with a range of other people to provide a holistic and consistent environment. Knockloughrim PS holds regular multi-agency meetings; additionally we collaborate with:

- Parents and carers
- Education Authority Autism Service
- Middletown Centre for Autism
- Speech and Language Therapists (SALTs)
- Occupational Therapists (OTs)
- Physiotherapists
- Educational Psychologists (EPs)
- Social Services Personnel