

## **Introduction**

This booklet has been compiled to offer strategies and advice for those working with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in mainstream schools. The advice provided is by no means exhaustive but hopefully will provide strategies that you can adapt for use in your own classroom.

The strategies suggested are all elements of good practice currently used in SBC schools and should be used alongside CPD, Spectrum Support staff and current guidelines.

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## **What is Autism Spectrum Disorder ? (ASD)**

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability. It is part of the autism spectrum and is sometimes referred to as an autism spectrum disorder, or an ASD. The word 'spectrum' is used because, while all people with autism share three main areas of difficulty, their condition will affect them in very different ways. Some are able to live relatively 'everyday' lives; others will require a lifetime of specialist support.

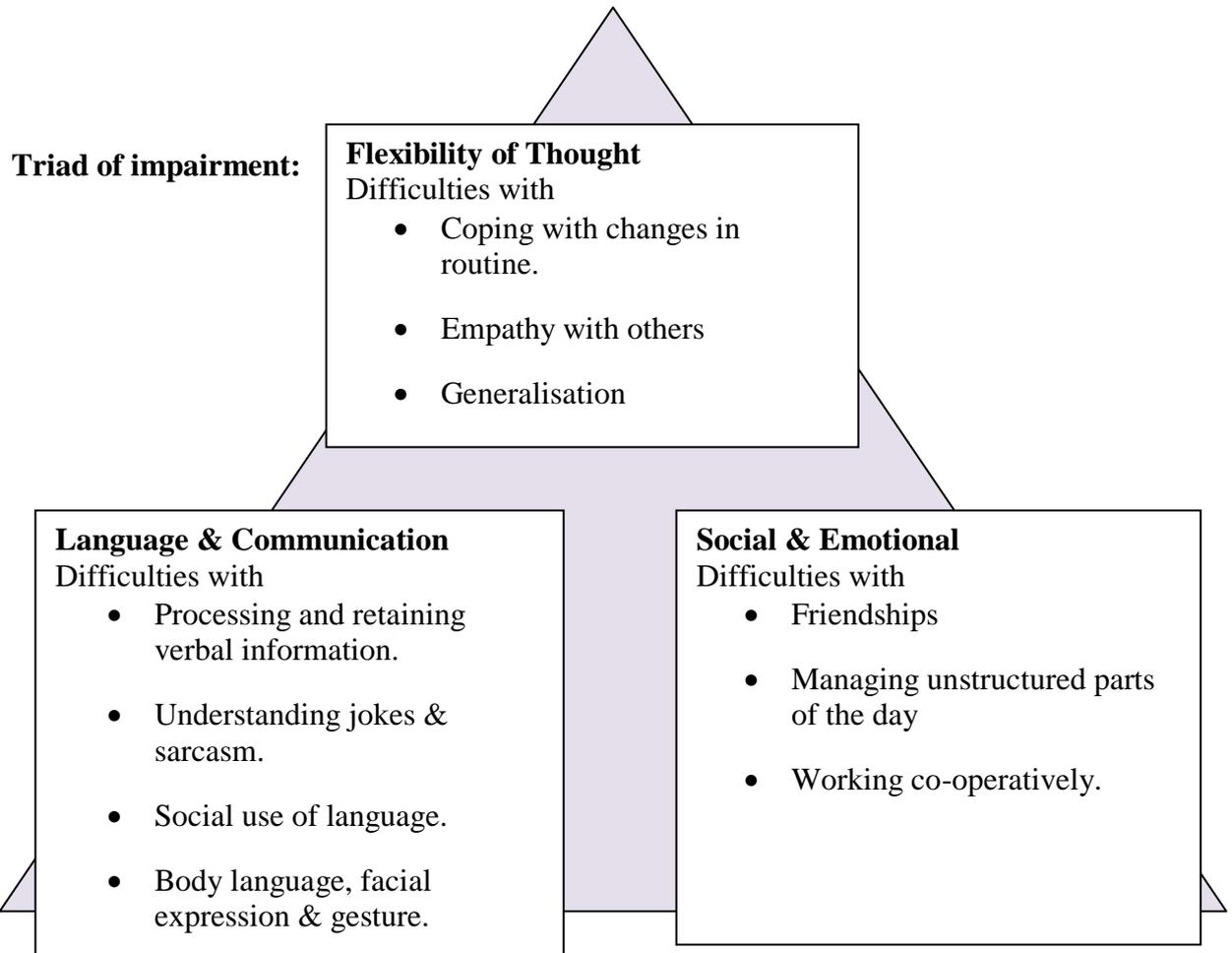
The three main areas of difficulty which all people with autism share are sometimes known as the 'triad of impairments'. They are:

- difficulty with social communication
- difficulty with social interaction
- difficulty with social imagination.

It can be hard to create awareness of autism as people with the condition do not 'look' disabled: parents of children with autism often say that other people simply think their child is naughty; while adults find that they are misunderstood.

## **A brief overview of the barriers to learning faced by pupils on the Autism Spectrum/Asperger Syndrome.**

Autism Spectrum Disorder/Asperger Syndrome is characterised by 3 main areas of difficulty which are usually referred to as the Triad of Impairment. Pupil's abilities within these three areas vary from mild to much more severe.



Many pupils struggle, despite having adequate, and sometimes even superior, academic abilities. This can in part be attributed to two major theories that have been linked to autism spectrum/Asperger Syndrome.

### **1. Theory of Mind**

This is the ability to appreciate and understand that other people have thoughts, beliefs, desires, intentions that may be different to our own.

This inability may result in difficulty with:

- predicting the behaviour of others,
- predicting other people's reactions,
- understanding deception or effectively deceiving others,
- reading the intentions / motives of others,
- understanding the effects of own behaviour on others,
- taking into account what others may know or be expected to know,
- understanding misunderstandings,
- reading and reacting to a listener's level of interest.

## **2. Executive Functioning**

Poor executive functioning leads to difficulty with tasks such as planning, getting started, prioritising and attending to more than one task at a time. Students are likely to have problems identifying and organising the steps, skills and materials needed to achieve learning goals.

This inability may result in difficulty with:

- attending to more than one sensory stimuli at a time,
- abstract thinking,
- retaining information in working memory while considering additional information,
- focusing on what is relevant,
- sequential processing,
- time organisation.

It is also important to take into account that many pupils with ASD/Asperger Syndrome also experience some form of sensory sensitivity. Pupils may be over or under sensitive to certain sensory stimuli (sights, sounds, smells). This can cause severe anxiety and make school a frightening or even painful experience unless it is recognised and dealt with in a sympathetic manner.

It is therefore important that staff take account of the many difficulties faced by these pupils and put appropriate strategies in place.

However it is easy to concentrate on the negative aspects and forget that pupils with ASD/Asperger Syndrome also have many positive attributes. These may include:

- Excellent memory particularly for rote learning of facts or figures.
- They are often very creative e.g. art, music may be a strength.
- Honesty
- Strong ability to focus on a particular task.
- Adheres to rules and regulations very strictly.

### **The First Few Days**

- Talk to parents as early as possible. They will have knowledge about the child's likes and dislikes and may be able to provide some useful strategies.
- Set up a way to communicate with parents and other agencies that is easy for all to use and not too time consuming for anyone.
- Consult with staff who previously worked with the child.
- Find out what the child really likes eg. trains, cars, computer and use that as an incentive to start off with.
- Remember you may be a stranger to the child and a relationship of trust, respect and security needs to be built.
- Make decisions beforehand about toileting; does the child need assistance with toileting, which toilets the child should use, how will the child ask to go to the toilet, who will take the child to the toilet.
- In the first few days establish a routine re, cloakrooms, following instructions such as where to sit on the carpet, sit on your chair, lunch arrangements, end of the day, asking to go the toilet. It may seem trivial but bad habits are hard to break with a child on the autism spectrum once routines have been established.
- Familiarise yourself with the child's school file as this contains important information that will help you understand the child's needs.
- Keep a separate folder for the child with information and strategies in a place where it can be easily accessed by anyone working with the child.
- Locate how help can be given if necessary- if the child attends spectrum support phone numbers of class teachers should be exchanged as good practice. If the child is in full time mainstream then locate which Outreach Teacher has been allocated the case and have a number ready to hand. Also timetable regular consultations with the support for learning teacher.

## **Issues That May Arise**

### **The child does not respond when I am talking to him/her:**

The child may not know you are talking to them:

- Use their name at the beginning of each instruction.
- Ensure you get a response before continuing with the instruction e.g. eye contact, or a verbal word. Remember lack of eye contact from the young person does not mean they are not listening or processing information.
- Allow plenty of time for the child to process what has been said. Try not to rephrase immediately as this may add confusion.

### **At the end of the school day the child just stands by the door without packing anything up:**

- Ensure the child knows the routine.
- Check the child has the skills to do these tasks.
- Prepare a visual schedule which details all the things that have to be done i.e. get bag from cloakroom, put reading book in bag etc.

### **The child starts off tasks well in class but loses motivation very quickly and refuses to finish them:**

- Use incentives to motivate the child. This should be something that the child really enjoys. Perhaps have various incentives during the day e.g. at the 3 definite intervals in the school day. Also the child could have a few to choose from.
- Try to plan rewards and treats as much as activities as this will save time and eliminate possible behaviour issues.
- Use Let's Make a Deal (LMAD)- workshop available in CPD directory.

### **The child is settled in to the routine within the class but behaviour becomes an issue when CSTs or Supply Teachers are in the class:**

- Have photographs up in the classroom or/and the child could have his/ her own copy of all the teachers that will be involved with the class.
- If a supply teacher is needed without any notice then perhaps a member of staff that the child knows well and trusts could introduce the teacher.

- Make sure there is key information about the child available to all members of staff working with the child and that information is displayed in an area for a supply teacher to use.
- Build in regular consultation times with any CSTs to discuss any problems that are occurring. Work together on these problems so that the child can clearly see continuity and consistency of approach.
- If an ANA is timetabled to be with a child during a lesson with a CST then it is important that consultation is done to ensure the role of the ANA is clear to everyone.

**The child seems to be distracted by the labels on his/ her uniform:**

- Discuss this issue with parents and possibly cut off the labels or stitch them flat on to the clothing.

**The child is new to the school and is finding it difficult to make friends:**

- Talk to the children in class about friendships and the fact that everyone is unique but we are all special.
- ‘Circle of friends’ is a good resource to use which contains lessons to build friendships.
- Talk to the parents and discuss the language that they will consent to you using with the class regarding the child. Some parents may be open with the idea of using the term autism and so this could be explained to the children. Please remember that not all children are aware of their diagnosis.

**Behaviours that other children notice as different such as hand flapping, noises, playing with toys in repetitive ways, appearing to ignore others communication:**

- Talk to the children in the class either to reassure or know how to help.
- There are many books available for use in classes to help promote discussion about autism.
- Discuss with speech and language therapist or outreach teachers about the possibility of making a Peer Passport.
- **Always check with the parents and child (if appropriate) beforehand.**

**The child has completed a task in the past but in a new class this may be different:**

- Lower your expectations of the child to begin with, be flexible and make the child feel comfortable.
- A different environment or a break over the holidays may make the child feel anxious.
- Ensure there are lots of opportunities for over learning and generalisation.

**Parents/ carers are saying the child is upset when they get home from school:**

- Appreciate that the child may have worked hard in school so behaviours at home can deteriorate because of this.
- A home school diary can be a useful tool to keep communication open.
- Sending home a weekly timetable at the start of each term can be helpful to parents to enable them to structure their questions to their child about their day at school.
- If children are expected to share 'news' with the class on a Monday then perhaps discuss this with parents beforehand and suggest that photographs or objects that may prompt their memory are brought in to school.
- Tell the parents know who is the named person in the school to contact if there is a problem. This will ensure effective communication.

**Situations Which May Require Some Additional Planning**

**Lunch time:** The lunch hall may be alarming for a child with ASD with its busy atmosphere and more noise than a classroom.

- Preparing the child with a schedule board or having a buddy system for the child so that security is given.
- Try to find a quieter area of the hall or begin lunch earlier/ later to miss most of the noise.

**Playtime:**

- A buddy system can be used here for security or a buddy seat put in the playground that the child can decide if he/ she would like to use it. This can be used for all pupils who find playgrounds a little overwhelming.

- Ensure the child knows what to do in the playground- perhaps teach them some simple games at a different time and take the time to transfer this to playtime.

**Wet playtimes and lunch times:** These can obviously happen at very short notice.

- A list of activities to choose from may be helpful which could include eat snack and go to the toilet.
- Also a short schedule may be made up to show what the child should do when the bell rings at the end of playtime.
- Using a different room for wet playtimes can also be helpful if available.

**PE:** The gym hall can be very daunting for any child and particularly a child with ASD. The child may see the empty space and want to run around or spin.

- Prepare the child for going to the gym hall beforehand with short visits with an ANA or parent and have a schedule board for what is going to happen in the gym hall so that the child is aware of his/ her expectations.
- PE sessions may need to be build up to increase tolerance.
- The child may need to be taught that the hall can be used for different purposes.

**Music:** Many children on the autism spectrum enjoy music and have skills for rhythm, however sensory issues could be an issue with noise and the variety of textures that instruments have.

- Perhaps allow the child to touch/ explore the instruments in his/ her own time before the lesson.
- Again a schedule for the lesson would be helpful if the child is anxious.
- Tolerance may need to be built up gradually.

**Assemblies:** Try to include the child as much as possible in assemblies.

- If the child is distressed or anxious then perhaps try for the beginning and end.
- However short the experience it should be positive and meaningful.
- If sitting in assemblies is not working have a short break from it and go back to it at another time.

Attending **parties** in school especially with fancy dress costumes can be quite frightening for a child on the autism spectrum.

- Discuss this beforehand with school staff and parents and consider the appropriateness of this activity for the child and the stress and distress levels it may cause.
- Have a clear visual plan for the party.

**Visitors** to the school can make a child with autism anxious.

- Beforehand speak to the visitor or company that are coming to the school and find out about noise levels, props or surprises they may have planned. This knowledge can be used to prepare the child in advance for what will happen.
- Again discuss the appropriateness and potential stress levels of the child beforehand with parents and members of staff.

**Outings:**

- These should be prepared in advance with the child in consultation with parents and staff particularly if there are potential difficulties with phobias etc.
- Staff should be informed at the place you are going to visit to eliminate possible misunderstandings.

**Sports Day:** can be another time when a child on the autism spectrum may feel anxious and unsure of what is expected of them.

- Prepare the child before hand and perhaps allocate them a task on the day.
- Also discuss with parents so that everyone can work together to relieve any worries.

### **Preparing For Transitions**

Transitions are a huge step for young people on the autism spectrum. Whether this is transition from nursery to P1, a class transition or a transition to High School they are all equally important and can cause anxieties for both the child and staff who will be working with the child. Below are a few key suggestions about transitions.

## **Nursery to P1**

- Take the child a walk round the school gradually with an adult the child trusts and knows- this should be done a few times starting with one or two areas and building this up into regular visits to complete activities in the new area..
- Prepare a photo book for the child to have over the summer holidays with pictures of their teacher, ANA, P7 buddies, classroom, cloakroom, desk, gym hall, music room etc
- Make arrangements for everyone to consult regarding transition arrangements- parents, school staff and other agencies.
- Work with parents so that discussions and questions can be raised at home to eliminate anxieties.

## **Transferring Classes**

- Start preparing for transitions early
- Again a photo book can be used with pictures of new areas in which the child will be working for the next academic year
- Prepare a schedule which visually tells the child the changes that will be taking place after the summer holidays.
- Take the child to their new classroom and give them opportunities to see and speak to their new teacher.
- If the teacher or ANA is unknown before the summer holidays a possible strategy would be to allow the child to come in to school for a short time to meet him/her on the in-service day- this would also give the child an opportunity to see the classroom the way the new teacher has set it up.

## **P7- High School**

The transition from primary to secondary school is a major change in a young person's life, but can be even more challenging for pupils with ASD. It involves a large number of changes which may include;

- ❖ Dealing with a much larger number of pupils
- ❖ Different travel arrangement to get to and from school
- ❖ Being the youngest at the new school
- ❖ More teachers
- ❖ A new and often much larger building

- ❖ New timetables
  - ❖ New and different routines
  - ❖ Coping with subjects they have not encountered before
  - ❖ A longer working day, taking into account travel time
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- Parents should play a key role. They should be part of the planning process and transition meeting and should be invited to join in with some of the visits to High School.
  - There are a variety of strategies that can be used to help settle a young person with ASD into a new environment. Spectrum Support Outreach staff are experienced at selecting suitable resources.
  - It is important that staff in High Schools are made aware of pupils with ASD. Pupil profiles should be available through the LS Department and Spectrum Support Outreach can be consulted.
  - The lead professional in the transition process will draw up a transition plan detailing pupil strengths and areas where more support may be required. This should also include any sensory issues experienced by the young person.
  - It is crucial that all agencies work together to ensure a smooth transition for the young person.

### **In Summary**

- A smooth transition of a child with ASD is vital, find out what worked well from previous teacher and ANA.
- Involve the management team in your school as part of your ongoing classroom practice.
- Ensure parents feel involved on a regular basis.
- Outreach teachers are available and can be accessed via a referral through an action point from a MAC meeting.
- Visit other schools to observe good practice

- Further advice can be found in SBC Guidelines “Guidance on the Education of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.” (Updated 2009) and The Autism Toolbox (2009). Every school should have a copy of these documents.
- A wide selection of CPD workshops are available throughout the year. Please book through the CPD directory.