

The Blue Tangerine Federation

SPECIALIST AND SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS SCHOOLS



POLICIES, GUIDANCE AND PROCEDURES

The Blue Tangerine Autism Handbook

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Rachel Andrew, St Luke's School

Nicola Elsdon, The Collett School

Blue Tangerine Autism Handbook

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Introduction

The Purpose of the Handbook

This handbook describes how The Blue Tangerine addresses the needs of children and young people who have Autism. It has been written jointly by the Autism Accreditation Leads from both schools to provide information and guidance for school staff and other professionals.

It is our aim that we all share a common understanding of Autism and work to the same principles by drawing upon a range of effective teaching methods to provide a holistic approach, taking into account the full range of children's educational, social and emotional needs.

What is Autism?

'Autism is a lifelong developmental disability which affects how people communicate and interact with the world. One in 100 people are on the autism spectrum and there are around 700,000 autistic adults and children in the UK'

'Autism is a spectrum condition and affects people in different ways. Like all people, autistic people have their own strengths and weaknesses'.

National Autistic Society, 2020

There will be specific cognitive differences in:

Theory of Mind (ToM) (Baron-Cohen, Leslie & Frith,1985)

Theory of mind refers to the everyday ability to infer what others are thinking (believing, desiring) in order to explain and predict their behaviour. As a result pupils with autism may not understand that others view situations differently, this causes:

- Confusion and fear of unexpected events
- Lack of understanding of social rules
- Attempts to control the environment

Executive Function

Executive functioning refers to the cognitive abilities that control and regulate other abilities and behaviour. Such problems impact upon the ability to:

- Hold onto ideas/thoughts while considering what to do with them;
- Plan in order to self-regulate;
- Initiate and stop actions;
- To monitor and change behaviour as needed

Central Coherence

Central coherence refers to the limited ability to understand context or to "see the big picture" It is a significantly different style of processing information (Frith, 1989) and a different type of attention. Information is processed in a detail-focused way, and takes less account of context. It results in a limited ability to understand context or to "see the big picture". This can lead to an uneven ('Spiky') cognitive profile (Happé, 1999) which might result in a specific particularly developed skill or area of knowledge ('islets of ability') (Shah and Frith, 1993).

Theory of Monotropism (Murray et al. 2005)

Monotropism is a tendency to focus attention on one thing at a time, with difficulty shifting attention and processing multiple stimuli which might support understanding. People without autism can divide their attention –polytropic processing (chatting, listening to the radio, driving); People with autism process in a linear monotropic way and find it difficult to divide their attention. This is suggested to be the basis of:

- Restricted range of interests
- ‘Hyper-awareness’ (environmental stimulus within an attentional tunnel, hyposensitivity to stimulus outside of it).
- The uneven skills profile in autism depends on which interests have been fired into ‘monotropic superdrive’ and which have been left unstimulated (p143)

Being Autistic

The list below (taken from the National Autistic Society’s website) outlines some of the main difficulties/differences autistic people may share...

- Social Communication and Social Interaction Challenges
- Repetitive and restrictive behaviour
- Over or under sensitivity to light, sound, taste or touch
- Highly focussed interests or hobbies
- Extreme anxiety
- Melt downs and shut downs

The Blue Tangerine Strategy

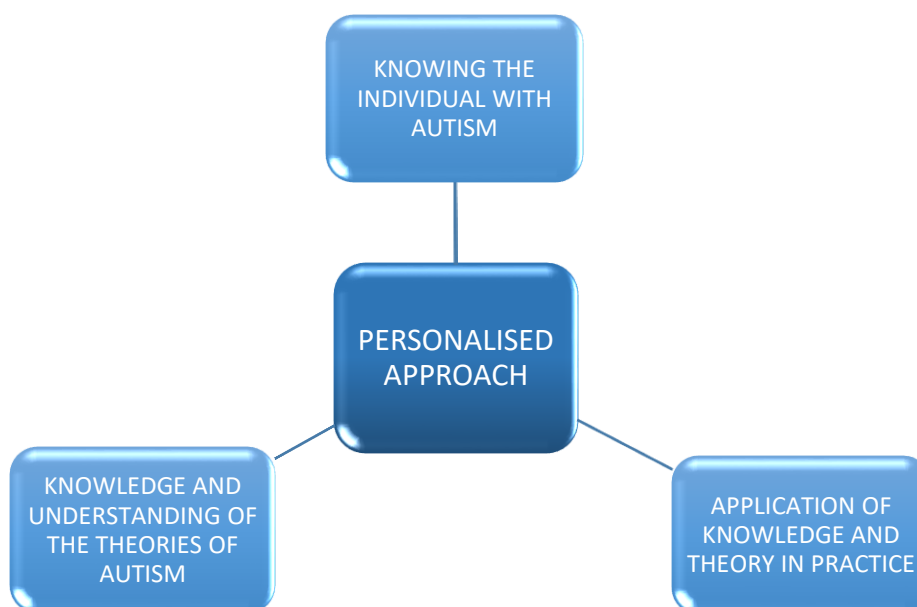
The Blue Tangerine Federation across its two learning difficulties schools, St Luke's and The Collett, has 320 pupils on roll, with approximately 60% of these pupils having a formal diagnosis of autism and many more showing signs of autism but not diagnosed. Both schools have achieved Autism Accreditation by The National Autistic Society, the UK's leading charity for autistic people. We have been part of the programme for a number of years and we continue to be in order to continue to develop and improve our practice for our autistic pupils.

We understand the unique impact autism has on each individual, and as a federation strive to accept each child or young person on the spectrum and develop an understanding from their perspective making adjustments to meet their needs. As a result, the Federation continues to research, adapt and introduce/scaffold new models of support to meet the needs of our diverse autism community. Our approach to the individual's education and care, coupled with the correct therapeutic and medical interventions allows the children and young people, who learn at our schools, to succeed, develop a sense of belonging and make progress towards lifelong goals.

We base our model of best practice on Leatherland's (2017) definition of autism, that,

'Autistic individuals share a neurological type, which is qualitatively different to that of non-autistics, and which will necessarily impact, both positively and negatively, on aspects of their thinking and learning; sensory processing; social relational experiences and communicative style, abilities and preferences. An autistic person's experience of and ability to be successful in the world will be dependent on the closeness of compatibility, between their individual profile of skills and requirements and their physical and social environment. Levels of sensitivity to environmental factors vary between individuals, and within the same individual overtime that the presentation of autism is ever changing. A person's neurological type, however, remains constant, and being autistic is a lifelong identity'.

Our autism approach is personalised to meet the specific needs of individuals. Underpinning our philosophy is the 'Blue Tangerine Triad of Support'



Our approach is based on the Autism Education Trust Progression Framework. It covers six focus areas:

- Communication and interaction,
- Social Understanding and Relationships,
- Sensory Processing
- Interests, Routines and Processing.
- Emotional Understanding and Self Awareness
- Learning and Engagement

Communication and Interaction

To develop expressive and receptive communication skills so that individuals can

- Engage in interaction with others
- Make requests
- Communicate information
- Comment on an event
- Extracts relevant meaning/information
- Understands humour and figurative speech
- Understands informal speech and slang
- Can engage in conversation

We do this through modelling positive communication behaviours that are embedded throughout interactions in daily experiences. Staff endeavour to support communication skills by:

- Using visual prompts or gestures, objects of reference and Makaton (Collette only) to support understanding of language



- Adjusting language to the individual; for some pupils adults use key words only.
- Delivering the structured literacy curriculum
- Specific social skills intervention tailored to areas of development identified through their pupil EHCPs
- Targeted language intervention as identified by our Speech and Language Therapist.
- Use of PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) or communication handbooks to support pupils to learn functional communication
- Calling the child's name to gain the attention before giving instructions

Social understanding and relationships

To develop social interaction skills and build positive relationships with adults and peers so individuals can

- Be in close proximity to others in a public space
- Engage in interactive play
- Have positive relationships with a supporting adult
- Have positive relationships and friendships with peers
- Take account of others' interests / needs / feelings within interactions
- Participate in group activity
- Participates in group discussion

We do this through a range of social opportunities throughout the school day, for example, as part of brunch or snack times and our methods of delivery of the national curriculum. We further support the development of social understanding and relationships through:

- Modelling positive relationships with others
- Specific social skills intervention tailored to areas of development identified through their pupil EHCPs
- Targeted language intervention as identified by our Speech and Language Therapist
- Participation in Circle Time activities

Sensory Processing

To develop understanding of own sensory needs so individuals can

- Accept support to manage own behaviour in relation to sensory needs
- Request help to manage sensory need
- Take action to manage own sensory need
- Reflect on sensory needs and behaviours
- Utilise the Zones of Regulation and their associated strategies to understand how emotions and sensory regulation are connected

The Blue Tangerine Federation schools maintain an autism friendly environment that is structured, predictable and where children are supported to feel safe through times of change, promoting a sense of calm throughout the schools. Our Intervention Department Leads works closely with all staff to ensure sensory input in all environments is at an appropriate level for the class, or the individual, in order to ensure optimum engagement and feelings of safety. This may be achieved by, for example, reducing noise stimulus for a child who is hypersensitive sound, or by allowing/increasing different types of movement for a child who requires proprioceptive/movement input

When a student's sensory need is particularly complex our Sensory Integration Occupational Therapist conducts a full assessment of need and advises specific personalised strategies that are recorded on a child's pupil profile or implements the appropriate sensory intervention to meet the sensory need.

Interests, Routines and Processing

Be enabled to cope with changes and transitions in a wide variety of situations and contexts so individuals can

- Accepts change within familiar situations
- Make successful transition in 'everyday' situation
- Engage with preparation for transition to new setting

- Use special interests to engage positively in activities
- Engage with a range of activities unrelated to special interests
- Make a choice
- Use information to plan and predict
- Recognise and takes action to solve problems
- Reflect on problems encountered and strategies used

We do this through visual information relating to change, such as now/next boards. Schedules that are individualised for the specific needs of pupils which include lesson, day and weekly timetables, information about changes to routines. The Personal and Social Development Curriculum further supports progress in this area.

Emotional understanding and self-awareness

To develop the ability to become aware of self and others so individuals can

- Identify own emotions
- Identify causes of self-emotions
- Respond to calming strategies
- Use own strategies to manage stress
- Use taught strategies to manage emotions and behaviour
- Reflect on behaviour
- Understanding others' emotions/ intentions
- Understand that other people have emotions or intentions that are different to their own and that is ok.
- Identify own characteristics
- Identify interests and strengths
- Understand own diagnosis (parental/carer consent needed)
- Identify difficulties
- Express preferences
- Express opinions/ideas

Emotional literacy support is embedded throughout the structure of our school day. Pupils regularly use the 'Zones of Regulation' to support the identification of their emotions; personalised strategies are implemented to support self-regulation as identified in the pupil's EHCP/pupil profile. Many of our pupils have a personalised 'toolkit' of strategies to support them to regulate their emotions and behaviour, examples of strategies include, blowing bubbles, laying under a weighted blanket or going for a walk.

Where children find it more complex to identify their emotions and respond with appropriate strategies, they access specific interventions to support the development of emotional understanding that is adapted to meet individual need.

Learning and Engagement

To develop the skills related to engagement and learning so individuals can:

- Attend to a task/activity
- Persist with activity
- Shift attention to another task/activity/request

- Work independently
- Plans work
- Carries out research into a topic
- Shows increased tolerance in relation to expectations
- Evaluates own learning
- Applies understanding of own learning
- Knows and applies own strengths
- Recognises own difficulties
- Sets own learning goals (with support)
- Understands the consequences of own choices and actions
- Recognises own achievements

Classroom structures support the development of these skills through implementing the TEACCH approach in differentiated formats. Pupils are aware of what is required in each session as learning is presented following a structured format - Pupils are presented with

- What they are learning.
- A defined amount of work.
- A clear finishing point/time.
- What to do next.

Pupils access this information through individualised formats for example, some pupils may use personalised task cards, now/next boards, and some children refer to whole class schedules.

There are additional systems in place to support the development of learning skills presented in a variety of ways specific to cohort and individual need such as visual timetables, visual schedules, specific subject visual supports, zoned environments and teaching areas, clearly labelled areas and resources.

Autism Observation Form



Date:

Time:

Observation:

Number of teaching/ Support staff:

Number of autistic people:

Differences in social communication							
Were autistic individuals supported effectively in relationship to communication and social understanding?							
Not met		Partially met		Majority met		Fully met	
What worked well and what could be improved?							

Self-reliance and problem solving							
Were autistic individuals supported effectively in relationship to developing their independence, ability to problem solve and transition between activities?							
Not met		Partially met		Majority met		Fully met	
What worked well and what could be improved?							

Sensory Experiences

Were autistic individuals supported effectively in relationship to sensory experiences?

Not met		Partially met		Majority met		Fully met	
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What worked well and what could be improved?

Emotional Well-Being

Were autistic individuals supported effectively in relationship to emotional well-being?

Not met		Partially met		Majority met		Fully met	
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What worked well and what could be improved?

GUIDELINES FOR OBSERVATIONS

The following guidelines are not intended to be prescriptive and may not all apply to all observations.

Differences in social communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff understand the function of each individual's communication and the challenges they may have in social interaction.• Staff modify their communication in order to enable the individual to understand instructions, requests or information e.g. use of language; visual supports etc.• People with autism are provided with personalised tools and support to enable them to communicate and interact successfully e.g. augmented communication; social stories, social scripts etc.• People with autism are provided with planned activities and opportunities to enable them to develop skills and experience in social interaction and communication within an increasingly challenging range of situations
Self-reliance and problem solving
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff understand the challenge each autistic person may have in coping with change, self-reliance and problem solving.• Staff support each autistic person in a way that encourages them to be independent and self-reliant.• The environment is maintained to support independent functioning e.g. structure; visual cues etc.• Activities are structured so that each autistic person can carry them out with minimum staff prompts.• Autistic people are provided with personalised tools and support to enable them to cope with change or novel/challenging experiences e.g. schedules; use of structure etc.• Autistic people are provided with planned activities and opportunities to enable them to develop skills and experience in coping with change, being independent and solving problems.• Autistic people are provided with personalised tools, support and opportunities to make choices and take decisions.• Activities and experiences help each autistic person to develop independent life skills and to stay safe and healthy.
Sensory Experiences
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff understand the challenges autistic people may have in sensory processing and take this into account in planning activities and modifying the environment e.g. low arousal environment etc.• Autistic people are provided with personalised tools and support to enable them to achieve a calm/alert state e.g. sensory breaks; ear defenders etc.

- Autistic people are provided with planned activities and opportunities to enable them to develop skills and experience in self-regulation of sensory issues e.g. sensory circuits; sensory room; multi-sensory activities etc.
- Autistic people are supported to have new or varied sensory experiences within a safe and supportive context.
- Autistic people are provided with opportunities to carry out sensory activities which they find enjoyable or stimulating.
- There are strategies in place to support autistic people if they are experiencing sensory overload or discomfort e.g. time out.

Emotional Well Being

- Staff seek to understand the underlying causes and function of behaviour that causes concern or distress.
- Staff employ personalised de-escalation techniques and positive behaviour strategies to prevent or address behaviour that causes concern or distress.
- Autistic people are provided with personalised tools and support to enable them to develop skills in understanding and managing their own behaviour and emotions and understanding the behaviours and emotions of others
- Physical restrictive interventions are only employed as a last resort by appropriately trained staff and in keeping with policy and individual behaviour support plans.
- The well-being and self-esteem of autistic people is enhanced in the way staff interact with them.
- Autistic people are able to experience activities which they find enjoyable, relaxing or which build upon their strengths and interests.
- Autistic people have self-directed opportunities to be able to 'be themselves'.
- Autistic people are supported to make a meaningful contribution to their community.

Fully Met	Each autistic person receives highly effective support based on a full understanding of their capabilities, strengths and challenges. As a result there are clearly evident positive outcomes and no identified areas for development.
Majority Met	Support for each autistic person is highly effective in more cases and situations and is based on an understanding of individual capabilities, strengths and challenges. Overall outcomes are positive but there are some relatively minor actions the service could take to improve practice further.
Partially Met	Support for each autistic person is reasonably effective and shows some understanding of individual need. There are some positive outcomes but also significant actions the service should take to improve practice further.
Not Met	Support for each autistic person is ineffective and shows a limited understanding of individual need. There are little or no positive outcomes and considerable actions the service should take to improve practice.

Blue Tangerine Federation Practice Guidelines

A child can access a 'safe independent life' if their school experience has been committed to developing and promoting independence at a functional level. Our pupils are 'enabled, accepted and respected' by embedding the six focus areas (Communication and interaction, Social Understanding and Relationships, Sensory Processing, Interests, Routines and Processing, Emotional Understanding and Self Awareness, Learning and Engagement) into our curriculum

Communication and Interaction

- Staff make themselves understood by simplifying or structuring verbal language and providing visual cues.
- Pupils can make themselves understood by using communication tools, PECS, ACC, writing frames etc



- alternate methods of communication when needed e.g. pictures, objects of reference, scribing, laptop
- Use of "Active Listening" strategies and reduction of visual and auditory distractions
- Use of accessible subject specific word banks, connectives and openers to support vocabulary and literacy development
- instructions broken down in to smaller steps
- Modelling and extending the students language/vocabulary

Social Understanding and Relationships,

- Pupils are provided with opportunity and purpose to interact with staff, with each other and where appropriate members of the public
- Use of "back chaining" strategies to help reinforce positive behaviours by developing 'small positive steps ending with a success'.

Sensory Processing

- Pupils can access sensory activities which they find enjoyable or relaxing – for example: sensory tray, fidget toys, putty, play doh, access to swings or seesaw and trim trail
- Pupils experience a range of sensory experiences within a safe and secure context
- Pupils are supported to regulate sensory experiences which interfere with what they are trying to do or cause discomfort e.g. use of ear defenders, work stations, request for time out, low arousal approaches etc.
- Individualised desks/workstations as appropriate. Standing work stations may be beneficial for children who like to stand regularly
- Space at back of room for movement breaks
- Individual consideration needs to be given to placement of desks based on presentation of pupil need e.g. Environmental distractions.
- 1:1 intervention with SIOT for identified pupils
- Sensory circuits, sensory play group for identified pupils
- Sensory OT as prescribed
- Available safe place
- Access to adults who understand the sensory needs of the individual

Interests, Routines and Processing.

- Use of personalised reward systems



- Use of motivators, possibly linked to the individual's special interest
- Visual timetables, Now/Next, Task Cards, "Plan-Do-Review" approach to activities

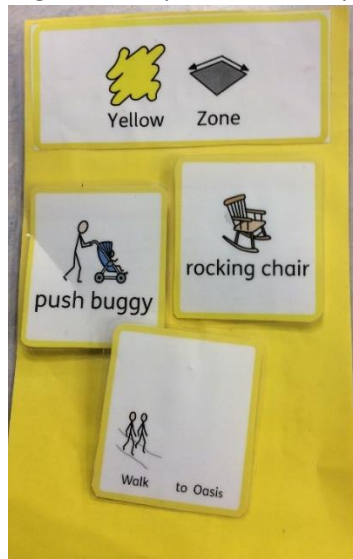


- Consistent labelling of equipment and spaces.
- Visual cues to contain both words and pictures

- Social Stories” to show the what is going to or may happen in different scenarios, and to support identification of expected behaviours and responses

Emotional Understanding and Self Awareness

- Pupils are supported to understand and regulate their emotions through the use of zones of regulation/5 point scale/Steps anxiety plan



- Opportunity to identify how they are feeling at the start of each session, and regularly check in throughout as appropriate
- Appropriate regulatory intervention in response to check in, in order to prevent behaviours from escalating (Steps anxiety plan)

Learning and Engagement

- Pupils are supported work out what they do now and what they are expected to do next e.g. visual schedules, work systems, now and next, task cards etc.

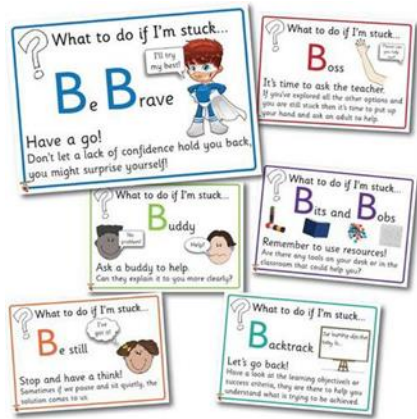


- Pupils are supported to do things by themselves, rather than constantly wait to be told by a member of staff ie task cards

Task Card Examples

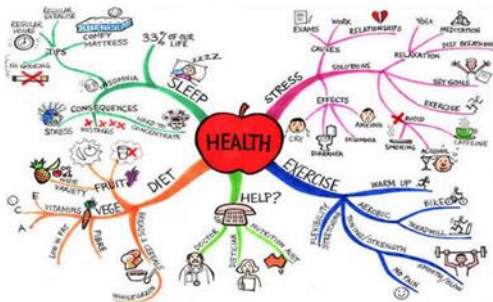


- Pupils develop skills and confidence in expressing opinion, making decisions and taking decisions by using choice cards
- Using scaffolding such as task cards, TEACCH approaches, personalised schedules, concrete resources or vocab mats etc
- Instructions: in sequential order and broken down
- Checking for understanding and encouraging students to indicate when they have not understood
- Develop strategies for problem solving 6Bs



- Use of mind maps and word webs to reinforce and revise learning

Mind Map Examples



- Pupils encouraged to develop individualised strategies to support their ability to participate positively in learning activities and group working

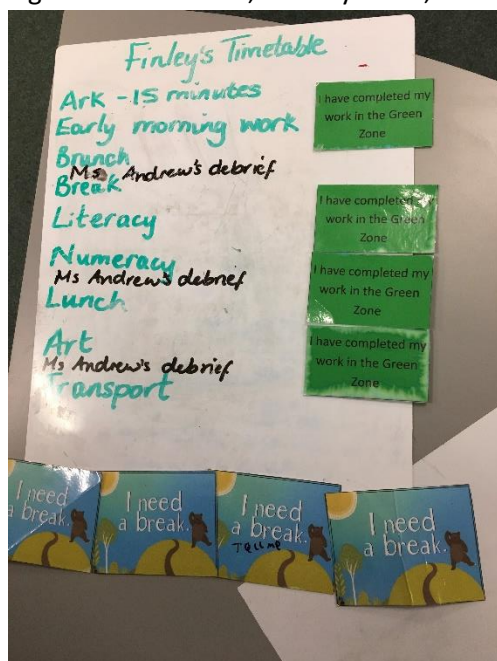
- problem solve barriers to learning and identify actions to remove those barriers enabling them to progress within a task or unit/section of learning

Social Communication

- We model what we want to see from the student: we use a calm and neutral tone of voice when in a quiet area rather than a loud voice.
- We use visual supports (eg symbols, timetables, Social Stories™).
- We are explicit: explaining why the rules and expectations are in place, including the unwritten rules.
- We don't expect eye contact if this is uncomfortable for the pupil; instead, we suggest the individual turns their body to face the speaker.
- Structured activities are available for break or lunch time. This can be easier than unstructured socialising
- We use everyday opportunities: Drama is an opportunity to explore body language and facial expression. English is an opportunity to discuss characters' motives and feelings.
- Situations are engineered to create an opportunity for communication and interaction.
- Various interventions re social communications using TALKABOUT are available. The aim being to give social knowledge that enables individuals to interact with a greater range of people and in a greater range of situations with more confidence.

Self-reliance and problem solving

- Opportunities to attempt activities as independently as possible (within context) are given, which appropriate supports in place , enabling them to experience a sense of completion and achievement
- We enable pupils to be able to work out what they do now and what they are expected to do next e.g. visual schedules, work systems, now and next, task cards etc.



- Tasks are broken down into small parts and visual instructions are given in sequential order.

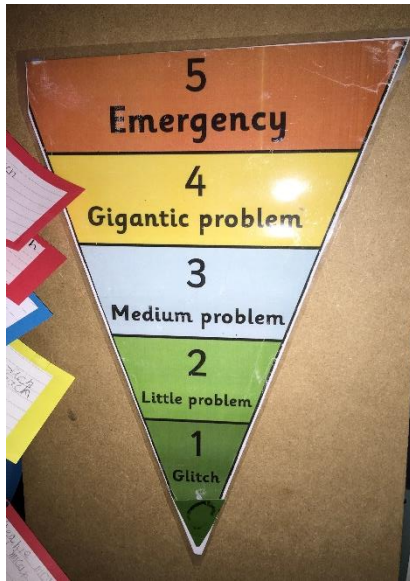
- We use visual supports to teach organisation
- There are designated labelled spaces where things go/belong in the environment
- Self -help strategies such as the 6Bs are used in the classroom

Sensory experiences

- Quiet spaces are provided, and these are kept quiet. Some pupils will need time and space to recover from the social interaction of the rest of the school day. These quiet spaces are accessible to all.
- As many sensory distractions as possible are eliminated in the environment without it impacting on a nurturing environment. Individuals may have their own area free from distractions to use
- We are aware of the environment (noisy/crowded) and understand that sensory input may affect how much individuals can process
- For someone who is over stimulated by their sensory environment we may reduce the artificial lighting, allow them to wear sunglasses, create a workstation in the classroom that blocks out visual distractions. We will shut doors and windows to reduce external sounds or provide ear-defenders or ear plugs or music of their choice to listen to. We prepare individuals before going into crowded or noisy places.
- We provide movement breaks, quiet breaks, safe spaces, sensory diets and sensory trays in classrooms
- Identified children are seen for Sensory Integration Occupational Therapy weekly.
- Safe spaces are provided around the school
- Sensory Play is offered as an intervention

Emotional wellbeing

- We don't mislabel feelings. Sometimes pupils require support to label their emotions, and to understand what these emotions might feel like.
- Various interventions such as art therapy and music therapy are available
- Zones of Regulation, green care and other emotional wellbeing therapeutic work are offered as interventions
- We use Zones of Regulation to check in which emotions throughout the day, pupils use 5 point scale or Zones of Regulation to give them strategies to manage their emotional wellbeing. We also offer size of the problem to discuss reactions after



- Mindfulness and relaxation is practiced

Quality First Teaching Expectations

- To help with processing of the spoken words we say less and say it slowly, using specific key words, repeating and stressing them. This gives the individual time to process what has been said, and to give them chance to think of a response.
- We don't ask too many questions, asking only the most necessary questions.
- We structure and build on our questions.
- For some pupils or during times of raising anxiety we offer options or choices.
- We use less non-verbal communication (e.g. eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, body language) when a person is showing signs of anxiety.
- Pupils have strategies in place if they find asking for help difficult – e.g. help-cards
- Use of irony, sarcasm, figurative language, rhetorical questions, idioms or exaggeration is avoided, though it is taught as part of our English/literacy curriculum. If we do use these, we give an explanation about what has been said and are clear about what it means.

Nationally Recognised Teaching Frameworks and Approaches

Intensive Interaction

Intensive interaction is a practical approach that can help children and adults who are in the early stages of communication development. It can be used to support those who have complex disabilities - including those who have autism or learning disabilities - to relate, and share experiences with others on their terms. Intensive Interaction works on early interaction abilities – how to enjoy being with other people – to relate, interact, know, understand and practice communication routines.

Intensive interaction teaches and develops the 'Fundamentals of Communication', Attainments such as: use and understanding of eye contact, facial expressions, vocalisations leading to speech, taking turns in exchanges of conversation and the structure of conversation

For children born with complex disabilities, learning to interact and communicate with other people can be very challenging. Sense Children and Family Support workers work closely with parents to help them to build a relationship with their child and to encourage communication between them.

Social Stories

The Social Stories concept was developed by child paediatrician Dr. Carol Gray in the early 1990s. Dr. Gray started writing these for the autistic children she worked with.

A social story is a narrative made to illustrate certain situations and problems and how people deal with them. They help children with autism understand social norms and learn how to communicate with others appropriately. Ten defining characteristics (The Social Story Criteria) guide the development of every Story

They support individuals with autism by:

- Teaching social norms
- Improving social skills“>social skills
- Learning to empathize and have compassion with others
- Reducing anxiety

This in turn means they be used for the following;

- Helping learn self-care and social skills
- Enabling children with special needs to understand their behavior as well as others
- Assisting in understanding emotions such as anger, sadness, and happiness, and how to address them
- Helping children on the spectrum cope with various changes and everyday life transitions
- Encouraging work on developing relationships and provides rewards for accomplishing social tasks
- Reinforcing proper and/or accepted behavior
- Teaching how to join in activities, use their imagination, and play with others
- Providing the tools to teach how to make and maintain friendships, as well as to join in group activities.

TEACCH

TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication related handicapped Children) is an evidence-based service, training, and research program for individuals of all ages and skill levels with Autistic Spectrum Disorders. TEACCH was developed at University of North Carolina (UNC) Chapel Hill in the early 1970s by Eric Schopler and colleagues. TEACCH uses a method called “Structured TEACCHing.” This is based on the unique learning needs of people with ASD, including:

- Strengths in visual information processing
- Difficulties with social communication, attention and executive function
- Structured TEACCHing provides strategies and tools for teachers to use in the classroom. These help students with autism to achieve educational and therapeutic goals.

The Structured TEACCHing approach focuses on:

- External organizational supports to address challenges with attention and executive function
- Visual and/or written information to supplement verbal communication
- Structured support for social communication

This method supports meaningful engagement in activities. It also works to increase students’ flexibility, independence, and self-efficacy.

Structured TEACCHing uses organization and supports in the classroom environment to help students learn best. This includes:

- Physical organization
- Individualized schedules
- Work (Activity) systems
- Visual structure of materials in tasks and activities

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 autism 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.

The acronym “SCERTS” • refers to the focus on:

“SC” – Social Communication – the development of spontaneous, functional communication, emotional expression, and secure and trusting relationships with 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 – the development and implementation of supports to help partners respond to the child’s needs and interests, modify and adapt the environment, and provide tools to enhance learning (e.g., picture communication, written schedules, and sensory supports). Specific plans are also developed to provide educational and emotional support to families, and to foster teamwork among professionals.

The SCERTS model targets the most significant challenges faced by children with autism by prioritizing the abilities and supports that will lead to the most positive long-term outcomes.

The SCERTS Model can be used with children and older individuals across a range of developmental abilities, including nonverbal and verbal individuals. It is a lifespan model that can be used from initial diagnosis, throughout the school years, and beyond. It can be adapted to meet the unique demands of different social settings for younger and older individuals with ASD including home, school, community, and ultimately vocational settings.

The SCERTS Model ensures that:

- functional, meaningful and developmentally-appropriate goals and objectives are selected
- individual differences in a child's style of learning, interests, and motivations are respected
- the culture and lifestyle of the family are understood and respected
- the child is engaged in meaningful and purposeful activities throughout the day
- supports are developed and used consistently across partners, activities, and environments
- a child's progress is systematically charted over time
- program quality is measured frequently to assure accountability

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC)

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) has been defined by the International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (ISAAC):

"AAC is a set of tools and strategies that an individual uses to solve everyday communicative challenges. Communication can take many forms such as: speech, a shared glance, text, gestures, facial expressions, touch, sign language, symbols, pictures, speech-generating devices, etc. Everyone uses multiple forms of communication, based upon the context and our communication partner. Effective communication occurs when the intent and meaning of one individual is understood by another person. The form is less important than the successful understanding of the message"

AAC covers a huge range of techniques which support or replace spoken communication. It can be divided into two groups: unaided and aided.

Unaided AAC strategies rely on the user's body to convey messages. Unaided strategies include gestures, body language, and/or sign language. Keep in mind that unaided communication strategies must be understood by others in order to be effective.

Aided strategies require the use of tools and/or equipment in addition to the user's body. Aided communication methods can range from paper and pencil to communication books or boards to devices that produce voice output and/or written output. Electronic communication aids allow the user to use picture symbols, letters and complete phrases to create messages. Some devices can be programmed to speak more than one language.

These include:

- Gestures
- Signing
- Symbols
- Word boards

- Communication boards
- Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
- Communication books
- Voice Output Communication Aids (VOCAs) Communication Matters

One of the goals of AAC intervention is to determine the communication, behavioural and social needs, identify strengths and match those strengths to possible solutions. While communication may be challenging for some individuals with autism, they possess many strengths that lend them to being able to successfully use different types of communication strategies. An augmentative communication system should:

- increase participation in the classroom, work, community and home
- address EHCP, work and personal goals
- support timely and interactive communication
- provide meaningful language to the recipient
- support language and literacy learning
- encourage successful day to day, face to face, real time interaction
- be age and level appropriate
- provide positive behavioural supports

The Picture Exchange Communication System, or PECS, allows people with little or no communication abilities to communicate using pictures. People using PECS are taught to approach another person and give them a picture of a desired item in exchange for that item. By doing so, the person is able to initiate communication. A child or adult with autism can use PECS to communicate a request, a thought, or anything that can reasonably be displayed or symbolized on a picture card. PECS works well in the home or in the classroom.

There are Six Phases of the Picture Exchange Communication System. These are as follows:

- PECS PHASE I: How to Communicate
The child with autism learns to exchange single pictures for items or activities they really want.
- PECS PHASE II: Distance and Persistence
Still using single pictures, the child with autism learn to generalize this new skill by using it in different places, with different people and across distances. They are also taught to be more persistent communicators.
- PECS PHASE III: Picture Discrimination
The child with autism learns to select from two or more pictures to ask for their favorite things. These are placed in a communication book, a ring binder with Velcro strips where pictures are stored and easily removed for communication.
- PECS PHASE IV: Sentence Structure
The child with autism learns to construct simple sentences on a detachable sentence strip using an "I want" picture followed by a picture of the item being requested.
- PECS PHASE V: Answering Questions
The child with autism learns to use PECS to answer the question, "What do you want?"
- PECS PHASE VI: Commenting
Now the child with autism is taught to comment in response to questions such as, What do you see?, What do you hear? and What is it? They learn to make up sentences starting with I see, I hear, I feel, It is a, etc.

5) Useful websites and resources to learn more about supporting autistic children and young people

[National Autistic Society - Autism support - leading UK charity](#)

[Autism Education Trust – AET](#)

[Middletown Centre for Autism - Middletown Centre For Autism \(middletownautism.com\)](#)

[What Is A Social Story? - Carol Gray - Social Stories](#)

[The TEACCH Autism Programme - Best Practice Resource \(middletownautism.com\)](#)

[Intensive Interaction - Fundamentals of Communication](#)

[The Sensory Story Project - The Sensory Projects](#)

[Talking Mats | Improving communication, improving lives](#)

6) Support services and groups for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders and their families.

[ADD-vance \(add-vance.org\)](#)

[Space Support Group - Hertfordshire \(spaceherts.org.uk\)](#)

[Angels Support Group for Parents/Carers of Children with ASD &/or ADHD \(autismlinks.co.uk\)](#)

[Lets do it! Autism family group \(facebook.com\)](#)

[Autismlinks Home Page...](#)

[Home - NAS Hertfordshire branch \(webeden.co.uk\)](#)