

Autism Response Strategy

As an education provider whose pupils are largely composed of those who fall within a diagnosis of Autistic spectrum condition (ASC), we are well versed in teaching and modelling, supporting and enabling young persons whose needs relate to difficulties and degrees of anxiety with daily functioning.

Our terms of reference and methodology in respecting and responding to a pupil with identified autism needs is referenced through the National Autistic Society's SPELL framework. This framework focuses on five principles that are identified as vital elements of best practice in autism and emphasizes ways to adapt or change an environment in addition to educational practices change to meet the given specific needs of an individual pupil.

SPELL stands for Structure, Positive, Empathy, Low arousal and Links. We have included Safeguarding advice from the NSPCC, therefore our reference framework is [Structure](#), [Positive](#), [Empathy](#), [Low arousal](#), [Links](#) and [Safeguarding \(SPELLS\)](#)

Structure

Structure makes the world a more predictable, accessible and safer place. We can support people on the autism spectrum in creating structured environments using visual information.

Positive

We must seek to establish and reinforce self-confidence and self-esteem by building on natural strengths, interest, and abilities.

- All people working within the schools are asked to ensure expectations are realistic and individual to the child. All work given must be achievable to ensure continued motivation and success.
- Reward strategies and motivators to ensure appropriate behaviour for learning is achieved, and can be utilised alongside the usual pupil code of conduct which is set out explicitly. A low arousal (dead pan) response when dealing with inappropriate behaviours, should generally be used.
- Maintain consistency when dealing with challenging behaviour through the use of Positive Behaviour support plans and mentoring which explicitly give positive alternatives.
- Staff identify and use a pupil's strengths or special interests when planning activities.

- We build self-esteem by creating opportunities for pupils to develop independence, have responsibility and contribute to a group.

Empathy

We must try to see the world from the standpoint of the autistic child or adult, knowing what it is that motivates or interests them but importantly what may also frighten, preoccupy or otherwise distress them.

Our empathetic approach has been developed to include:

- A pupil profile or communication passport is recommended to increase staff understanding and share preferred modes of working alongside an individual pupil. This will include triggers to behaviour, phobias, motivators and anxieties. Include a sensory profile to understand which stimuli are highly sensitive.
- We use strategies such as “circle of friends”, drama and social communication group sessions alongside class and individual mentoring to promote the importance of everyone making allowances for and respecting difference.
- Staff offer practical help for problem areas such as social scripts and understanding social rules, using social stories.
- All Staff are trained to see behaviour as a means of communication – *what is he/she trying to tell me?*
- All Staff are asked to ensure actual comprehension has been achieved –understanding may be masked by learned phrases or echolalia. An environment of seeking clarification is encouraged within the school and staff have training in giving modelled answers to aid meaning and understanding.

Links

People with autism, their parents or advocates should be seen as partners. Open links and communication will reduce the risk of misunderstanding, confusion or the adoption of fragmented, piecemeal approaches.

- We endeavour to encourage parents and or care givers to be involved throughout the process to help monitor progress and review targets. We share information through home and school dialogue to ensure consistency of approach both in the home and school environment.
- We see the individual pupil themselves as a partner in the education process and consult with them and their parents on developments.

- We ensure, through daily debriefing meetings, that all staff are informed of support strategies and current issues for any given individual.
- Information is shared with other professionals such as Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists and Educational Psychologists.

At Cornfields and Belle Vue schools we work within the SPELL framework and ideals by implementing a structure according to individual preference needs as follows:

- Planned time tables are produced and followed to help the pupil to predict what's happening next, and to tell them about any changes to the usual routine. For certain pupils where their rigidity and inflexibility causes stress the timetable may not be shared directly on their own work space as this itself could heighten anxiety and reduce their coping ability. We can use timers for specific individuals to clearly label how long an activity will last.
- Tasks are explained or given in small manageable chunks with a clear start and end point.
- We may use visual cues (symbols and pictures) to support a pupil's understanding of an activity.
- Use of **now** and **next** boards to move pupils through an individual activity or timetable.
- Teaching and Progress Engagement Guides will carefully structure their communication. This is achieved by using the pupil's name first to obtain their attention before giving an instruction and allow the pupil time to process this before moving onto the next. Staff will endeavour to use language that is clear, precise and concrete.
- Language Through Colour and other writing scaffolds are used to support written communication which relies on imaginative input, an area of significant difficulty for many of our ASC pupils.
- Adults also provide the structure in unstructured times, for example, offering choice boards and structured games at lunch time and playtime. Limit choices, making them clear to avoid any confusion.

Low Arousal

Approaches and the environment need to be calm and ordered in such a way so as to reduce anxiety and aid concentration. This can be achieved in a variety of ways including:

- The school environment is regularly checked for potential distractions specific to the individual (flickering lights, strong smells, food dislikes of specific pupils at lunchtimes and noises) and this is completed through pupil dialogue and partnership.
- Individuals can negotiate the use of, or be directed to a workstation or space free from distractions for work tasks or learning new or complex skills, to assist their learning programme. Specific pupils will require an individual place to eat their lunch too due to issues around eating with others.
- We aim to filter out irrelevant stimuli, for example, unnecessary illustrations on worksheets.

- Resources to address individual needs (ear defenders to block out sounds when working, tangle toys, weighted blankets etc) are utilised.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding children also extends to how we provide education to our pupil.

Children with additional learning needs may be more vulnerable than their peers because they:

- have additional communication needs
- they do not understand that what is happening to them is abuse
- need intimate care or are isolated from others
- are dependent on adults for care.

Some of these reasons may be apparent and presented as a pupil having a difficulty with either direct verbal communication, extended social communication both verbal and non-verbal, interpretation of nuances of others language delivery and sensory difficulties related to their autism and their understanding of the environment they are operating within at any given moment.

Adults in our school are aware that the additional needs children may have could mean they are more vulnerable to abuse and/or less able to speak out if something isn't right.

This document is intended as a guide to our core offer but will be adapted for specific pupils where other resources and interventions are identified in their Education and Health Care Plan.