

OUR PHILOSOPHY & APPROACH



**Belle Vue
School**

**Cornfields
School**

'Improving life chances'



OVERVIEW

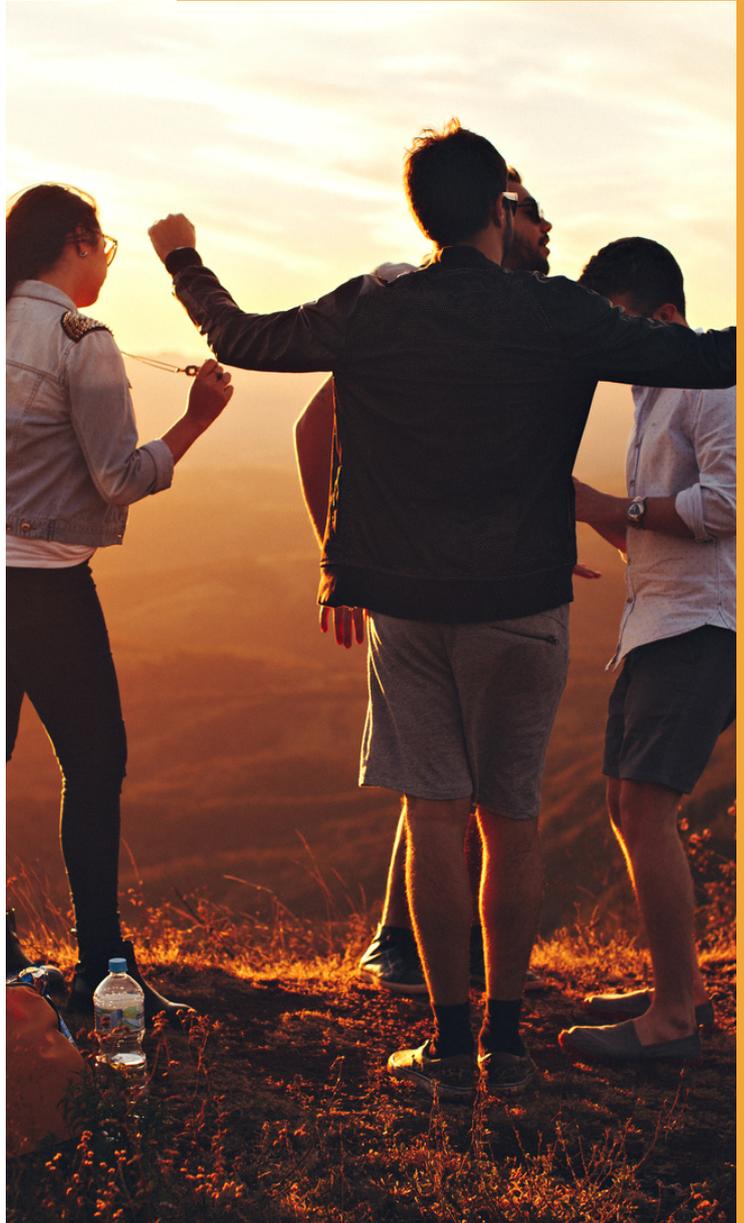
Belle Vue and Cornfields are independent specialist schools that share a unique philosophy and approach, built on tried-and-tested principles.

Fundamentally, we understand that we are all individuals. Our approach is not a 'one size fits all' but instead offers a tailored, rich, and stimulating education experience for all our pupils, according to their needs. We recognise that many of our pupils encounter additional challenges in terms of their well-being, learning needs, early experiences of school and anxieties about being in school.

Therefore, everything we do is crafted to deliver a bespoke education, carefully nurturing each pupil to ensure that positive outcomes are achieved - and their life chances are improved.

The relationship between staff and pupils is one of the main foundations of our work and is important in establishing and securing positive outcomes for our pupils.

Our staff show empathy, warmth and unconditional positive regard, working with methods that have been proven to show results.



OUR VISION

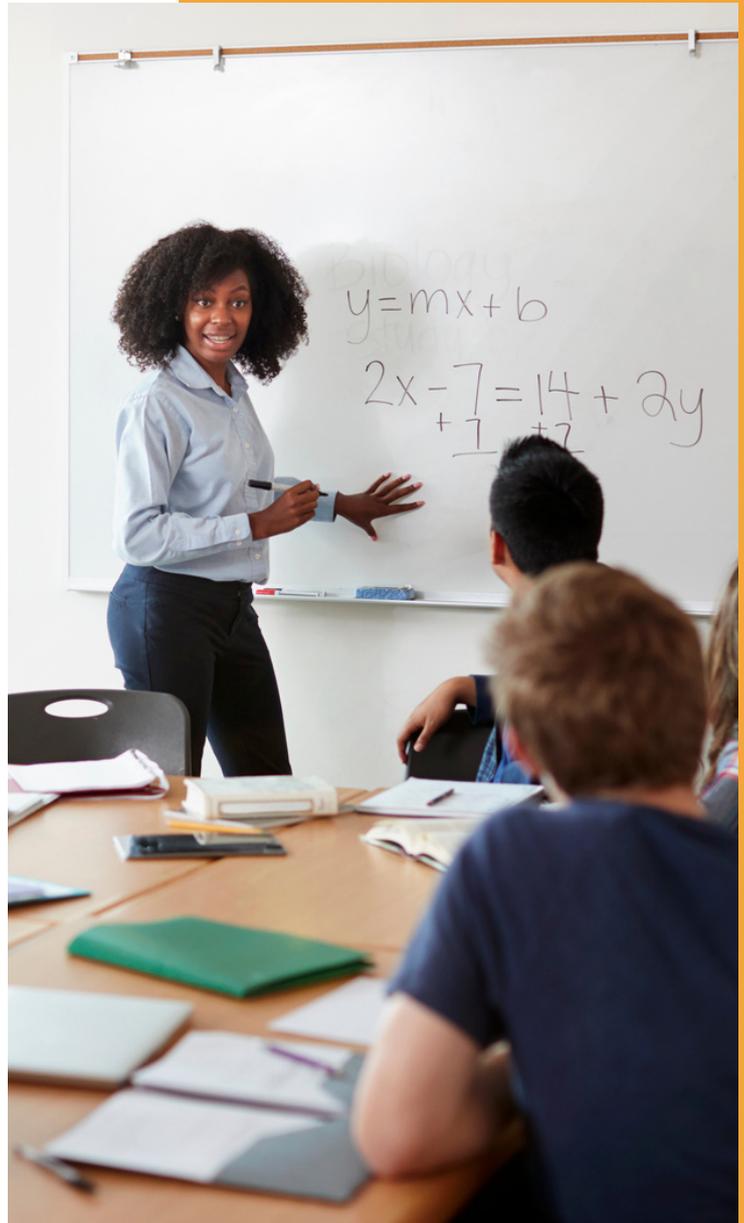
Our vision is that every pupil should go to an inspiring and life-changing school, should have access to the best teaching and benefit from services working in partnership with each other, to ensure that their life chances are improved.

At the core of our schools is this drive to improve the life chances of all pupils.

We will go above and beyond, set high expectations and improve outcomes by working together with others.

Our driving principles are:

- That pupils will feel they belong to a community,
- That pupils are prepared for life as citizens in modern Britain,
- That pupils learn at pace, ensuring academic understanding,
- That pupils are taught how to become resilient so that they can cope with setbacks,
- That pupils are supported to be healthy and safe.



A NURTURING ENVIRONMENT

We know that Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), as defined by Anda et al., 2009, can have lifelong consequences for children, so all our staff are trained and supported with regards to understanding trauma and how to best support pupils' learning. We understand that well-being and learning are inextricably linked, so we also work to foster emotional resilience with all our pupils. It is a significantly rewarding experience for all involved.

Our schools have a positive learning ethos with high expectations and clear, consistent boundaries, while working in partnership with parents, carers, the local community and Local Authorities.

All of our pupils have a voice and the opportunity to contribute to their school community. We explicitly teach social skills and prosocial behaviour which, combined with the strong sense of belonging experienced by our pupils, results in the acknowledgement that they are valued and respected members of their school community.

This sense of belonging and social order has an immediate and significant impact on emotional health and allows pupils to feel at ease quickly. This is a major contributing factor to the calm environment we experience in our schools where tolerance, understanding and learning follow.



THE ONBOARDING PROCESS

Admissions to our schools are as a result of direct referrals from Local Authorities and in accordance with our published Admissions Policy.

When a new pupil joins, we informally assess their skills through every aspect of their day – from arriving in school, responding to our routines, social interactions, and sensory responses – to the environment and their academic skills. We also conduct formal assessments to accurately baseline working-at levels. All our pupils have an EHC plan and we use these plans – together with information from parents/carers and the informal assessment – as a starting point to plan and develop bespoke programmes of education. These programmes of education are the subject of continual assessment to ensure that they are meeting the needs of the pupils.

Our cohort groups are small and we use a nurture-group approach in each of our classes with clear expectations. Transitions are planned and discussed and opportunities for positive social interaction and practical learning are offered.

Initially, tasks may be low-demand to enable us to develop relationships and trust with the pupils. They may be non-directive and experiential as many of our pupils have not been in a school setting for some time.

We have high expectations and we use the detailed data we gather for our pupils through observation, individual work and interactions to accurately establish their baseline. We use our information to develop and determine strategies in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for all our pupils.

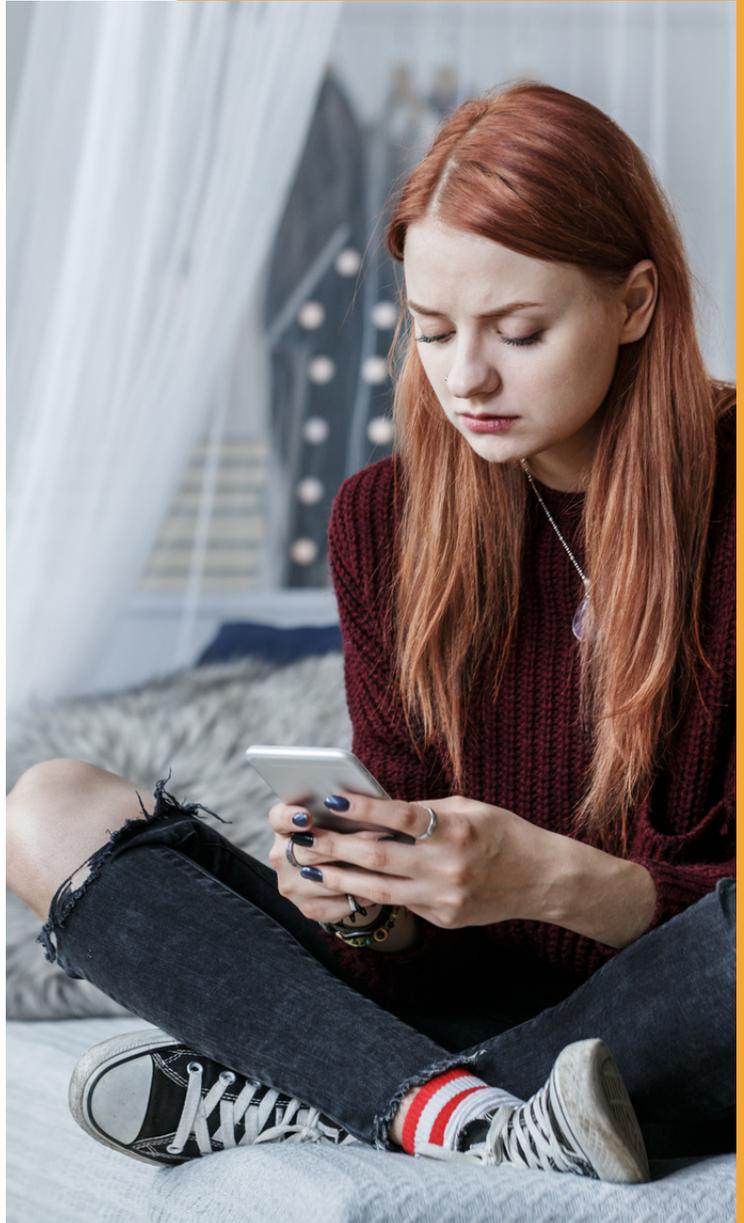


A BESPOKE CURRICULUM

All our pupils have an individual view of the world – we embrace this individuality and use their interests and strengths as a starting point to engage them and develop their skills – so they can engage in positive learning. As with all individuals, our pupils have both areas of strength and areas in which they are not necessarily as strong. Often, pupils in a cohort will have different starting points. We consistently adopt a ‘one size does not fit all’ approach in order to support all our pupils.

We are adaptable and responsive to the needs of our pupils and review our practice and programmes regularly. Our reviews are flexible to reflect the prevailing needs of the pupil concerned, which may result in frequent adjustment. The programmes of work available to pupils are designed to broaden their experiences and develop their coping skills in the world around them.

We have re-imagined the curriculum to reflect the complex needs of our pupils, many of whom have had a negative experience of school in either mainstream or specialist provisions. Many of our pupils have a diagnosis of autism and additional comorbid needs, many experience high levels of anxiety, have mental health needs or experience social and emotional difficulties.



We recognise the impact of these needs on the ability to engage and participate in social and learning activities.

We offer literacy, numeracy, humanities, science, art, music, PE, drama, a range of vocational skills, linguistics through a range of practical, sensory, and real-life experiences – both in school and our community. Personal, Social, Health Education (PSHE), Spiritual, Moral, Social, Communication Education, Online Safety and British Values are an important part of our curriculum at every stage. We work alongside our pupils and model positive attributes while reinforcing these attributes through explanation and discussion.

All achievements are celebrated, no matter how small, and we work to ensure that progress is made by all pupils. The schools adopt a holistic approach, working with parents, carers, external agencies including Speech and Language, Educational Psychology, Police, Social Services, CAMHS and Health so that the pupils' needs can be met. We are supportive of parents and carers and offer them informal meetings, consultations and training opportunities if they wish to take part. There is a balance of focus between achievement, learning and well-being for pupils.

Our schools deliver a compassionate school approach, incorporating the principles and values of nurture. We ensure that these principles are weaved throughout the curriculum and interaction with our pupils.

Ultimately, it is the compassion of our staff, combined with training and understanding, that ensures positive relationships are fostered. By maintaining this approach and constant threads of communication between the pupils and the staff, we can truly work to improve the life chances of every pupil.

We work with two schools of thought when it comes to compassion and nurture, starting with ten key principles of compassionate schools, as demonstrated below.

The ten principles of a compassionate school are:

1. Focus on culture and climate in the school and community.
2. Train and support all staff regarding trauma and learning.
3. Encourage and sustain open and regular communication for all.
4. Develop a strengths-based approach in working with students and peers.
5. Ensure discipline policies are both compassionate and effective (Restorative Practices).
6. Weave compassionate strategies into school-improvement planning.
7. Provide support for all pupils based on what they need.
8. Create flexible accommodation for diverse learners.
9. Provide access, voice, and ownership for staff, students and the community.
10. Use data to determine strategies in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for our pupils.

Our approach is also aligned to the ethos of nurture groups. The principles that underpin nurture groups are evident in our curriculum, in our teaching and our interactions. The results of these tactics are all evident in the improved behaviour and attendance of our pupils.

In addition to adopting the ten principles of a compassionate school, we also adopt the six principles of nurture groups, as demonstrated below.

The six principles of nurture groups are:

1. Pupils' learning is understood developmentally.
2. The classroom offers a safe base.
3. Nurturing is important for the development of self-esteem.
4. Language is understood as a vital means of communication.
5. All behaviour is communication.
6. Transitions are significant in the lives of pupils.

Our staff are our most important asset in our schools and at the end of each day we provide a reflective space for our staff to share each pupil's achievements. We have a creative, solution-focussed approach to challenges and will dynamically amend programmes as required.

The compassionate approach in our school is underpinned by staff training, offered in topics such as teaching and learning, SEND, autism, ADHD, trauma, attachment, SEMH and additional learning needs particular to our cohort. We have utilised Video Interaction Guidance (VIG) for staff to improve lesson delivery and staff confidence. VIG is a relationship-based approach that allows participants to reflect on their communication and draws attention to successful practice, supporting them to make changes if desired. We know that by being informed, reflective and aware of our strengths, we can become more robust in our planning, teaching and reviewing of pupils' progress.



OUR APPROACH TO AUTISM

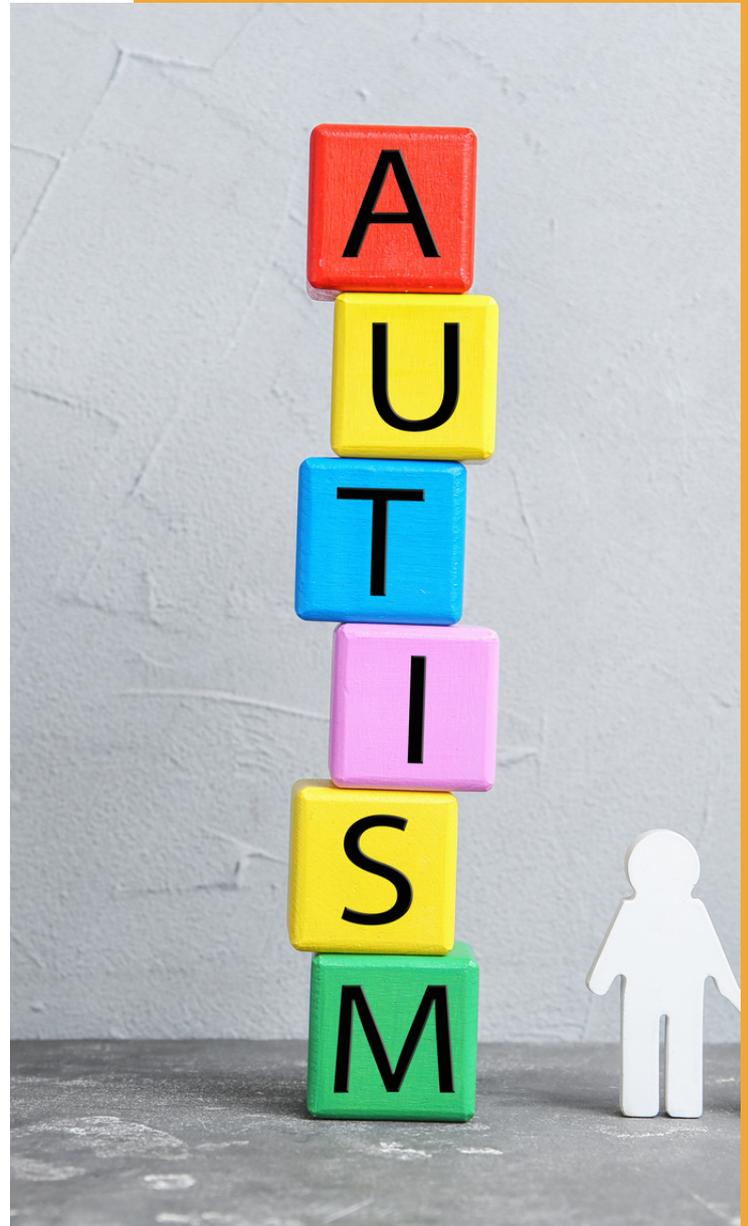
Many of the pupils we teach and support have an autism spectrum condition (ASC) and need their environment, teaching and communication considered carefully to allow them to feel and be comfortable, understood and supported. All staff undergo training in autism and the SPELL frame work.

SPELL is the National Autistic Society's framework for understanding and responding to the needs of autistic children and adults. It focuses on five principles that have been identified as vital elements of best practice when working with people with a diagnosis of autism – and emphasises ways to change both the environment and our approaches to meet the specific needs of each person.

The framework is used in our day-to-day work and also behind the scenes, when planning and making decisions.

The acronym for the SPELL framework stands for **Structure, Positive** (approaches and expectations), **Empathy, Low arousal**, and **Links**.

The SPELL framework recognises the individual and unique needs of each of our pupils and emphasises that planning and intervention be organised on this basis. It provides a context for – and is complementary to – other approaches.



WHAT IS THE SPELL FRAMEWORK?

Structure

Structure makes the world a more predictable, accessible and safer place. We can support autistic people by creating structured environments using visual information. Structure can aid personal autonomy and independence by reducing dependence (e.g. prompting) on others. Environments and processes can be modified to ensure each person knows what is going to happen and what is expected of them, thereby reducing anxiety.

Positive (approaches and expectations)

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

Expectations should be high but realistic and based on careful assessment. Assessments should be made from as wide a perspective as possible and should include a view of the barriers in accessing opportunity. For example, some autistic people may have difficulty with verbal communication, leading to an underestimation of their ability and potential. Conversely some may have a good grasp of speech, but this may mask other difficulties. Many autistic people may avoid new or potentially aversive experiences – but through the medium of structure and positive, sensitive, supportive rehearsal – we can reduce their level of anxiety, learn to tolerate and accept such experiences and help them to develop new horizons and skills.

Empathy

We must try to see the world from the standpoint of the autistic child, knowing what it is that motivates or interests them, but importantly what may also frighten, preoccupy or otherwise distress them. This is a key ingredient in the 'craft' of working with autistic people.

Making efforts to understand, respect and relate to the experience of the autistic person must underpin our attempts to develop communication and reduce anxiety. The quality of the relationship between the person and supporter is of vital importance. Effective supporters are calm, predictable, good humoured, empathetic and analytical.

Low arousal

Approaches and the environment need to be calm and ordered in such a way so as to reduce anxiety and aid concentration. There should be as few distractions as possible, paying attention to noise levels, colour schemes, odours, lighting and clutter, for example. Some people may need more time to process information, especially speech. Clear information should be given in the medium best suited to the individual, with care taken not to overload or bombard. Some people may seek out sensory experiences. This is best achieved with an approach where the input can be regulated.

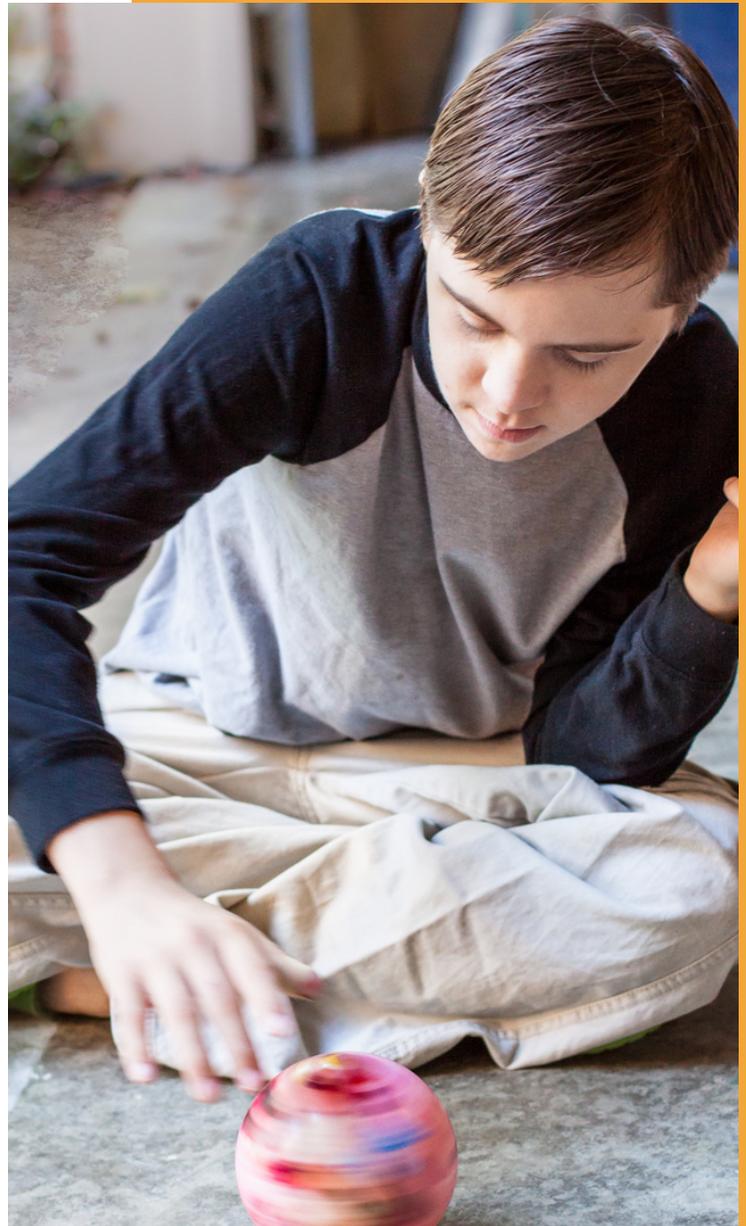
Low arousal cont.d

Low arousal should not be confused with 'no arousal'. It is of course desirable that people are exposed to a wide range of experiences but that this is done in a planned and sensitive way. It is recognised that for the most part, the individual may benefit most in a setting where sensory and other stimulation can be reduced or controlled. Supplementary relaxation and arousal reduction therapies, multi-sensory rooms, music, massage or a sensory diet may be helpful in promoting calm and general well-being, and reducing anxiety.

Links

Autistic people, their parents or advocates should be seen as partners. We recognise the benefits of sharing information and working alongside the individual, their families and other professionals. Open links and communication will reduce the risk of misunderstanding, confusion or the adoption of fragmented, piecemeal approaches. We create and maintain links between the individual, their wider support networks and the community.

Our staff are aware that some behaviours displayed by pupils with ASC are not them choosing to be 'naughty.' Many of the pupils at our schools have been reprimanded for these behaviours in previous settings and may become upset for being told off for something they may not understand they are doing. It is our job to ensure we sensitively teach the pupils how to interact, communicate and behave appropriately.



INTELLIGENCE-LED APPROACH

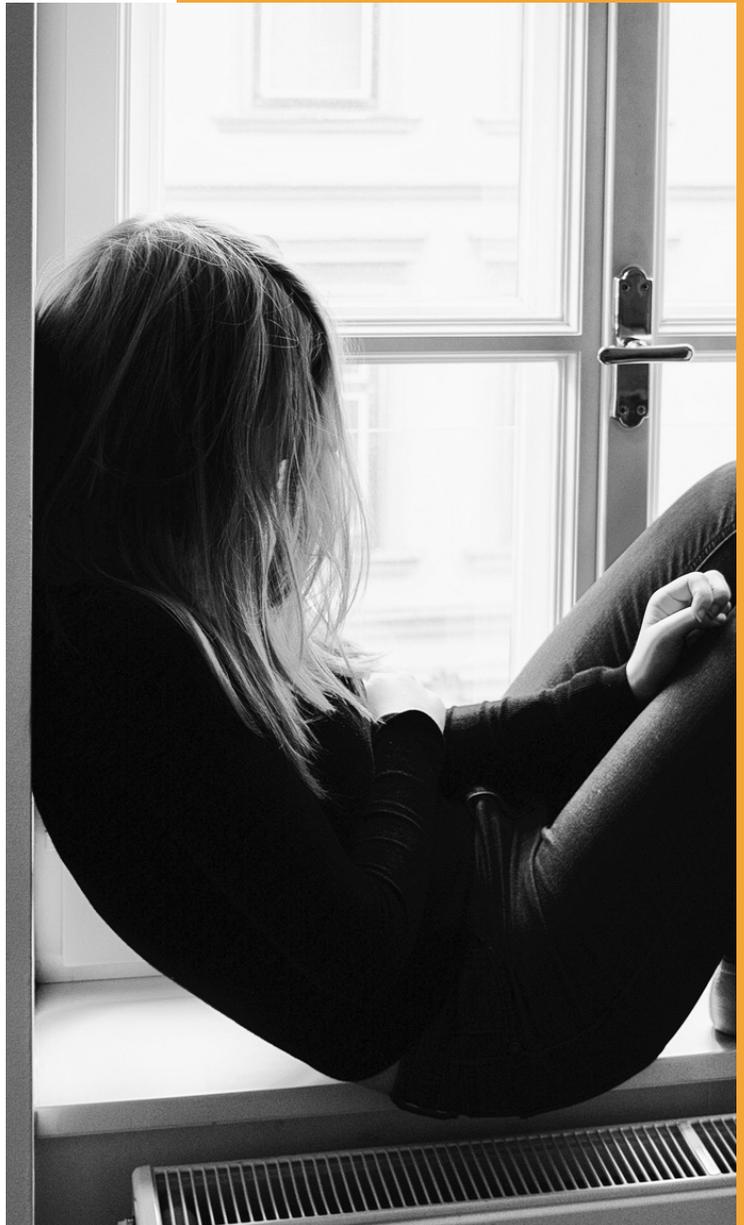
Our ability to learn the lessons and to develop our practices has been taken a step further with the mirroring of the analytical intelligence-led policing model.

Intelligence-led policing was itself developed from military experience. This model critically analyses the information available and serves to develop actions and strategies to resolve any issues that are present, or can be reasonably expected to occur.

With a background in policing, the Headteacher, Mary McKeeman, brings with her years of experience with tried-and-tested methods from intelligence-led policing. Through experience, we believe that accurate data is fundamental to the success of identifying and resolving issues - and this also applies to our schools and their pupils.

We are so confident in the value of accurate and reliable data and its analysis that we have employed a former senior police data analyst (leaving teachers to teach and not manage data), to ensure we are fully equipped to deliver a curriculum and an environment that provides results and positive outcomes for all.

By bringing in best practices from other industries and settings, we can truly make a difference in closing the disadvantaged gaps and support our pupils.



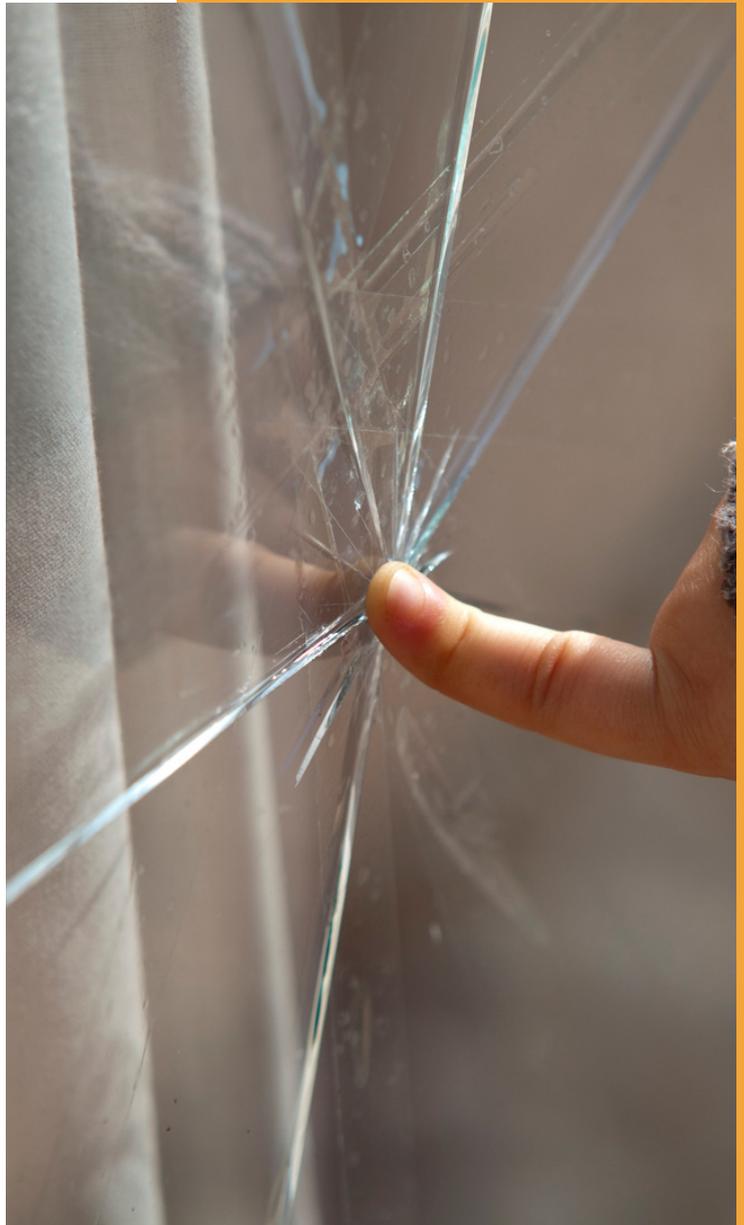
ADOPTING THE BROKEN WINDOWS THEORY

All our pupils have a unique view of the world. We use their interests and strengths as a starting point to engage them and develop their skills, so they can engage in positive learning. We look at what they can do, using positive skills to inform the work we do with them.

Each of our pupils has a different starting point – there is no single solution or programme of study for our pupils and as a result, we are both creative and original in our approach. It is also imperative that we are adaptable and responsive to the often daily changing needs of our pupils and that we review our practice and programmes regularly. The programmes of work available to pupils are designed to broaden their experiences and develop their coping skills in the world around them.

In the 1990s, New York introduced the Broken Windows Theory, a criminological theory that states all visible signs of crime, anti-social behaviour and civil disorder create an urban environment that encourages further crime and disorder, including serious crimes.

The Headteacher, Mary McKeeman, visited New York to see this theory in action. We adopt the same approach of dealing with any minor issues of disruption to prevent higher levels of poor behaviour occurring. Using this approach throughout our schools promotes a positive, enlightening and respectful environment that results in a culture of respect, tolerance and high expectations.



While our pupils all present with additional challenges, our expectations are unapologetically high as we know that every individual is able to contribute positively to society. Although our schools are calm and orderly environments, we understand that on occasions some pupils may become overwhelmed. While we will deal with this sensitively and with understanding, we are also resolute that any damage caused will see the pupil returning to school in their own time to help repair the damage in line with a restorative-practice approach.

This approach has had the effect of cementing a sense of ownership in the school with all pupils and has seen impressive results. In the last two years, there have been only two incidents of damage being caused, both of which were resolved in this manner and have resulted in no recidivist behaviour.

We further reinforce our commitment to a compassionate approach with our pupils by adopting a conflict management style whereby physical intervention is the absolute exception and not the rule. Our staff training provides the tools to better deal with challenging situations without having to resort to physical intervention or restraint. Incidents of physical restraint are dealt with as critical incidents and in-depth debriefings are self-directed to question how the incident could have been recognised earlier, and averted, to ensure relevant lessons are learnt. It is worth noting that incidents of physical intervention within our schools are rare.

We believe it is important to take learnings and best practices from other areas of the world and other industries in order to learn and grow ourselves, so that we can truly provide and deliver the best possible outcome for all our pupils. First and foremost however, is our unwavering belief that we are all individuals. As such, our pupils should be treated as individuals in a space where their strengths are celebrated and areas of less strength are reinforced, to improve their life chances.

