

Maplewell Hall School

Autism Policy



This Autism Policy covers the entire school and relates to individuals both in the Autism Unit (The Eaves) and those on the autistic spectrum whose needs are best met in the other classes.

Rationale:

In order to ensure that pupils on the autistic spectrum are able to access the broad, balanced and relevant curriculum offered to pupils throughout our school the individual characteristics of pupils on the autistic spectrum need to be taken into account. These needs should be taken into account in all aspects of their school life, including the school environment, planning, personalised teaching and learning activities and non-teaching activities such as lunch times.

Aims:

At Maplewell Hall we aim to:

- *Be a centre of excellence where all are challenged to achieve their full potential within a caring and supportive learning and teaching environment.*
- *Use our knowledge and understanding of autism to consistently inform our practice and provide effective support for pupils to achieve their full potential.*
- *Achieve the National Autistic Society Autism Accreditation Status to validate what we do for pupils with autism.*
- *Enforce the SPELL framework (Structure, Positivity, Empathy, Low arousal, Links) promoted by the National Autistic Society and outlined below.*

Introduction:

Maplewell Hall School is a school for pupils aged between 11 to 19 years who have a statement of special educational needs or Education, Health and Care Plan. As well as learning difficulties many of our children face difficulties associated with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Autism is a lifelong developmental condition which results in neurological differences in the way that parts of the brain are structured. Therefore pupils with autism are likely to perceive, interpret, process and experience the world in a different way.

All people with a diagnosis of autism have a triad of challenges that affect each individual to a greater or lesser extent. Pupils who have more severe characteristics are taught in the Autism unit where there are two mixed aged classes, one for KS3 and one for KS4. Pupils with less severe characteristics are integrated in classes across the school. Pupils may move from one provision to another during their time at school. This is dependent on their changing needs.

The triad of is made up of challenges in: Social communication and Social interaction, flexibility of thought and sensory difficulties.

Social communication and Social Interaction

People with autism do not develop a 'Theory of Mind' at the same time or to the same degree as the rest of the population. This means that it is difficult for a pupil with autism to understand that others have independent thoughts and thus different perspectives from their own. This can cause a variety of problems in terms of interacting with others as a pupil with autism will be at the very least delayed in their ability to understand others' points of view, or struggle to realise that communication is necessary for others to understand and meet their needs.

Pupils with autism find it difficult to process and understand the social world. Social rules and conventions that the rest of us learn intuitively often need to be explicitly taught and even then may not be fully understood and applied. Many pupils with autism want social relationships, but most struggle to know *how* to interact, and experience high levels of anxiety in social situations.

Ways we address students' communication and social interaction needs:

- Guided social time activities for KS3
- Social Communication lessons for the KS3 Eaves class.
- Reflection and mediation as part of the behaviour policy.
- Many structured social events for students to practise the social and communication skills learnt in class.
- Social skills groups as part of the intervention timetable.
- Structured SEAL time with tutors weekly.
- Clear visual supports
- Modified language and printed text.
- Use of social stories and comic strip conversations.
- Visual problem solving using green and red choices.
- Use of clear, simple language.
- Structuring the environment in a way that is visually clear to the individual.
- Use of structure to help individuals understand what they are doing, how long they might be doing it for and what they will be doing next. This may include pictorial or written timetable, objects of reference or photographs, timers.

Restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests or activities

Pupils with autism have a difficulty with **flexibility of thought**. Some pupils with autism may find it very difficult to change the focus of their attention so may become stuck or obsessed with a particular item or topic of conversation. They are likely to find dealing with new situations difficult due to difficulties with generalising skills and experiences learnt from other situations. Often pupils with autism can find change and transition problematic, e.g. transitioning between activities, or changes to expected activities, so they rely on routines and predictable events to feel secure.

Ways we take consideration of pupils' difficulty with flexibility of thought:

- Visual timetables
- Notice given when changes are foreseeable.
- Timers used to visually show students when an activity is coming to an end and a new activity is due to start.
- Experiential learning through robust independence programmes in the Eaves, KS4 and KS5.
- Home school books to communicate daily with parents.

Sensory issues

Many pupils with autism also experience differences in the way their sensory processing systems work. Some may be particularly (hyper) sensitive to different sensory stimuli, others under (hypo) sensitive or a mix of both hypo and hyper, we respect each pupil's individual sensory profile. Some may be hyper sensitive to noise so may hear, become upset or distracted by noise that the rest of us would hardly notice. Conversely others may be hypo sensitive to touch so may need to exert extra pressure when touching objects or other people to receive the same sensory feedback.

Most pupils with autism have issues with sensory processing and integration meaning that they may struggle to process and understand the information coming in from a variety of sensory modalities. They may struggle to filter out irrelevant information and to concentrate on what is necessary.

Ways we support students with sensory challenges:

- All students undertake a sensory profile on entry to the school.
- Identified students have directed time in the sensory room.
- Some identified students are directed towards activities called sensory circuits as part of the intervention schedule.
- Students may wear ear defenders or sit in a different place to avoid auditory over stimulus.
- Students are encouraged to challenge their sensory sensitivities through gradual desensitisation.

Anxiety

Pupils with autism often experience very high levels of anxiety. This is true for pupils with autism across the spectrum – those functioning at a lower level may experience stress and anxiety related to difficulties communicating and understanding the world around them; those functioning at a higher level may have more insight and awareness into their difficulties and differences in comparison with other people their own age. High levels of stress can emphasise and increase those other difficulties described above as well as having a possible impact on mental health and emotional wellbeing e.g. they may also suffer from low self-esteem or be lonely.

Ways we support students with anxiety at Maplewell:

- Art therapy
- Counselling
- Family support to access CAMHS
- Exam concessions

- Time to talk (intervention schedule)
- Managing Emotions visual grid.
- Low arousal environments. Teaching new skills in a calm low arousal environment with these visual supports, before generalising to more 'real life' environments.

Managing Behaviour for pupils with Autism:

Our behaviour policy is completely autism friendly and includes the strategies listed below:

- To manage a behaviour that has occurred de-escalation techniques are employed e.g. reducing demands, removing triggers, distracting and motivating, reducing sensory input (turning off lights, reducing noise and language).
- Knowledge of an individual's likes are used to motivate and engage them in their learning.
- Knowledge of their individual dislikes, triggers and cues to behaviour are used to identify potentially difficult situations and prevent the behaviours occurring. For example, teaching coping strategies such as requesting a fast walk or to move to a quiet area, stress management and relaxation techniques, changes to the environment, providing alternative ways to meet the same need the behaviour achieves (e.g. use of sensory items to chew on instead of biting), providing structured times for appropriate engagement in activity.
- To manage a behaviour that has occurred de-escalation techniques are employed e.g. reducing demands, removing triggers, distracting and motivating, reducing sensory input (turning off lights, reducing noise and language).
- On some occasions when there is no alternative and as a last resort it may be necessary to use Team Teach (a positive handling strategy).
- At Maplewell we seek to discover the function and/or communicative intent behind behaviours through the use of good quality functional assessment (incidents are logged and patterns sought) Interventions that teach functionally equivalent alternatives to difficult behaviours are then planned.
- It is a non-aversive approach meaning that we focus on positive reward and teaching new skills, not punishments and sanctions.
- There is a focus on determining antecedents to behaviour and then removing or minimizing effects.
- Teaching functional communication that is relevant and useful for the individual is paramount.

Underpinning all teaching and learning is an emphasis on the development of skills to enable pupils to operate as independently as possible in society in the future.

Equal Opportunities and Inclusion

At Maplewell Hall we aim for pupils with autism to have a range of opportunities for inclusion both within the school and in the wider community. Community visits are encouraged, such as using the bus, shopping, crossing the road, using public libraries and cafes. Skills learned in a classroom environment can be practised and generalised in a real life situation outside of the classroom. Developing an understanding of how to stay safe is built into the curriculum (e.g. learning about road safety, stranger danger, safe use of electrical equipment and tools for cooking and design). Staff work hard to support and develop the pupil's self-advocacy skills through the teaching of communication skills and how to communicate wants and needs as well as how to say no.

We also feel that it is important that all students are accurately diagnosed. If we feel that a student may have autism but does not have a diagnosis we will work with parents through the annual review process to refer to the Educational Psychology Service for assessment.

SPELL FRAMEWORK:

Maplewell Hall follows the SPELL framework (structure, positive, empathy, low arousal, links).

The SPELL framework recognises the individual and unique needs of each child and adult and emphasises that planning and intervention be organised on this basis. We believe that a number of interlinking themes are known to be of benefit to children and adults on the autism spectrum and that by building on strengths and reducing the disabling effects of the condition progress can be made in personal growth and development, the promotion of opportunity and as full a life as possible. They are:

Structure

The importance of structure has long been recognised. It makes the world a more predictable, accessible and safer place. Structure can aid personal autonomy and independence by reducing dependence (eg prompting) on others. The environment and processes are modified to ensure each individual knows what is going to happen and what is expected of them. This can also aid the development of flexibility by reducing dependence on rigid routines. Structure plays to the strengths of a sense of order and preference for visual organisation commonly associated with the autism spectrum.

Positive (approaches and expectations)

It is important that a programme of sensitive but persistent intervention is in place to engage the individual child or adult, minimise regression and discover and develop potential. In this respect it is important that expectations are high but realistic and based on careful assessment. This will include the strengths and individual needs of the person, their level of functioning and an assessment of the support they will need. We must seek to

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

It is vital that assessments are made from as wide a perspective as possible and that assumptions are made on the basis of painstaking assessment and not superficial enquiry. These should include a view of the barriers in accessing opportunity. For example, many people on the autism spectrum may have difficulty with oral communication, leading to an underestimation of their ability and potential. Conversely some may have a good grasp of speech but this may mask a more serious level of disability.

Additionally, many people with autism may avoid new or potentially aversive experiences but through the medium of structure and positive, sensitive, supportive rehearsal can reduce their level of anxiety, learn to tolerate and accept such experiences and develop new horizons and skills.

Empathy

It is essential to see the world from the standpoint of the child or adult on the autism spectrum. This is a key ingredient in the 'craft' of working with children and adults with autism. We must begin from the position or perspective of the individual and gather insights about how they see and experience their world, knowing what it is that motivates or interests them but importantly what may also frighten, preoccupy or otherwise distress them.

To make every effort to understand, respect and relate to the experience of the person with autism will underpin our attempts to develop communication and reduce anxiety. In this, the quality of the relationship between the person and supporter is of vital importance.

Effective supporters will be endowed with the personal attributes of calmness, predictability and good humour, empathy and an analytical disposition.

Low arousal

The approaches and 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. Some individuals may require additional time to process information, especially if this is auditory. They have additional sensory processing difficulties; they may need extra time to process information or we will need to pay attention to potentially aversive or distracting stimuli, for example noise levels, colour schemes, odours, lighting and clutter. Information is given with clarity in the medium best suited to the individual with care taken not to overload or bombard.

Some individuals may be under responsive to sensory experiences and actually seek additional sensory sensations. Again this is best achieved with an approach where the input can be regulated.

Low arousal should not be confused with "no arousal". It is of course desirable that individuals 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. Additionally, supplementary relaxation and arousal reduction therapies, Snoezelen, music and massage, sensory diet etc. may be helpful in promoting calm and general well-being and in reducing anxiety.

Links

Strong links between the various components of the person's life or therapeutic programme will promote and sustain essential consistency.

Open links and communication between people (eg parents and teachers) will provide a holistic approach and reduce the possibility of unhelpful misunderstanding or confusion or the adoption of fragmented, piecemeal approaches.

The people with autism, their parents or advocates are very much seen as partners in the therapeutic process. Links with the mainstream, through curriculum and other experiences, enable the individual to participate in a meaningful way in the life of the wider community.

This policy is underpinned by a commitment from the school leadership team to ensure staff are well equipped to enforce the policy through adequate training and resources.

Policy created by S. Beale

8th June 2015

Signature _____

Renewal date: 08/06/16

Linked Policies:

- Equality
- CPD
- Induction
- Teaching and Learning
-