

THE EDUCATION VILLAGE ACADEMY TRUST



Autism Policy

EVAT Version Control Document

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Monitoring and review

This policy is reviewed every **3 years** by the Policy Owner: **Caroline Green**

The scheduled review date for this policy is March 2025

Values and Ethos

Our values and ethos are inclusive and child centred. Our Trust is founded on the principles of inclusivity, diversity and fairness, and they are fundamental to our delivery of exceptional learning experiences.

EVAT stands for:

- **E**xcellence and high standards
 - a can-do culture and no-excuses ethos
- **V**alues driven with a deep sense of purpose
 - putting children and young people first
 - behaving ethically
- **A**mbition and aspiration for all
 - irrespective of background or barriers – being truly inclusive
- **T**eamwork
 - we do more, better and faster, together

We are a village. We collaborate, with our learners, their families and our communities, to provide exceptional education so that all the children and young people we serve achieve the best possible outcomes.

Our Ethos is to:

- Create a nurturing and friendly atmosphere and provide an environment where everyone feels valued for who they are
- Bring out the best in every child and young person and meet the full range of their individual needs
- Provide different and unique experiences, challenges and activities
- Show tolerance and respect for each other
- Prepare our children and young people for lifelong learning
- Improve the life chances of every child and young person we serve.

This policy, and its associated procedures and protocols, are based on these key principles.

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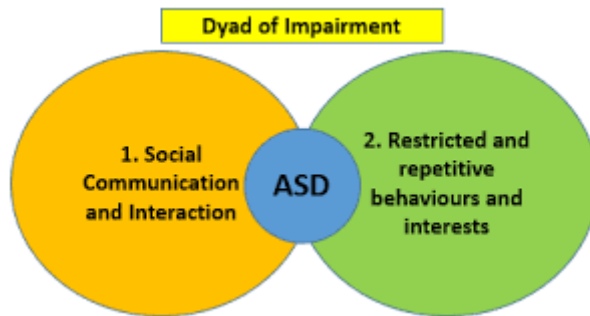
N.B. Where reference is made to an 'Academy' or a 'School' the intention is that the policy is universal and applies to both.

AUTISM POLICY

Definition

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

Autism Spectrum Disorders now has two categories of impairment instead of three, so a triad (triangle of issues) of impairments is replaced by a dyad (2 pillars of issues) of impairments. These are 'social communication deficits' (combining social and communication problems) and 'restricted/repetitive behaviours' and the terminology of 'Language impairment/delay' is no longer included and a new clinical feature; 'unusual sensitivity to sensory stimuli' has been introduced.



Social communication deficits

Social communication

Autistic people have difficulties with interpreting both verbal and non-verbal language like gestures or tone of voice. Some autistic people are unable to speak or have limited speech while other autistic people have very good language skills but struggle to understand sarcasm or tone of voice. Other challenges include:

- taking things literally and not understanding abstract concepts
- needing extra time to process information or answer questions
- repeating what others say to them (this is called echolalia)

Social interaction

Autistic people often have difficulty 'reading' other people - recognising or understanding others' feelings and intentions - and expressing their own emotions. This can make it very hard to navigate the social world. Autistic people may:

- appear to be insensitive
- seek out time alone when overloaded by other people
- not seek comfort from other people
- appear to behave 'strangely' or in a way thought to be socially inappropriate
- find it hard to form friendships.

Repetitive and restrictive behaviour

With its unwritten rules, the world can seem a very unpredictable and confusing place to autistic people. This is why they often prefer to have routines so that they know what is going to happen. They may want to travel the same way to and from school or work, wear the same clothes or eat exactly the same food for breakfast.

Autistic people may also repeat movements such as hand flapping, rocking or the repetitive use of an object such as twirling a pen or opening and closing a door. Autistic people often engage in these behaviours to help calm themselves when they are stressed or anxious, but many autistic people do it because they find it enjoyable.

Change to routine can also be very distressing for autistic people and make them very anxious. It could be having to adjust to big events like Christmas or changing schools, facing uncertainty at work, or something simpler like a bus detour that can trigger their anxiety. (www.autism.org.uk March 2022)

Rationale

Due to the nature of Autism, all daily activities are approached using strategies which take the two areas of impairment into account and in addition to these impairments, people with autism may also be affected by learning disabilities and difficulties, which can vary in severity. Such students often also have sensory processing difficulties.

We understand and value the fact that each person with autism has their own individual personality and is a unique individual.

Planning Structure

To enable students to learn, the following strategies may be employed:

- TEACCH system.
- Visual Timetables.
- Now and Next cards.
- Preparing students for any transition or change.
- Social stories.
- Highly visual delivery of curriculum content.
- Use of minimal language which is concise and relevant.
- Multi-sensory approach.
- Makaton.
- PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System).
- Intensive Interaction.
- Daily opportunities for physical activity.
- Behaviour management through Team Teach approach.
- Colourful Semantics.
- Hydrotherapy.
- Rebound Therap.
- Use of laptops/iPads/tablets.
- Emphasis on life skills appropriate to each student's needs.
- Individualised sensory diets.
- Occupational Therapist input and strategies.
- Speech and Language Therapy input and strategies.
- Sensory breaks and use of quiet rooms to support self-regulation.
- Positive Behaviour Support Plans, autism specific, reflecting behaviour management strategies through a student's position on the curve of arousal.

Teaching and Learning Strategies

Students with autism may find whole group teaching more difficult at times and thus the curriculum may be delivered in a small group basis, subject to the individual's unique needs. Staff need to be creative and flexible in their approach to cater for the students' distinctive styles of learning, sensory needs and individual personalities.

Due to the visual learning style of many students with ASC, the following resources may be used to the delivery of the curriculum:

- Materials which are relevant and meaningful to individual students.
- Edible and sensory reinforcers.
- Access to computers, tablets, interactive whiteboard and appropriate software and apps.
- Access to the internet and apps.
- Multi-sensory materials including story sacks, play-dough, puppets, sand etc.

- Access to multi-sensory equipment providing proprioceptive and vestibular input, where appropriate.

Collaboration with Other Professionals

In EVAT, there is a great deal of collaborative working with other professionals linked to students with ASC. These professionals and services are contacted for advice and support on a student-by-student basis.

Our collaborations include:

- Liaison with Speech and Language Therapy (SALT), both internally and through the NHS.
- Liaison with Occupational Therapy (OT), both internally and through the NHS.
- Educational and Clinical Psychologist involvement.
- Social Services department of Children's Services.
- Outreach work with mainstream schools, nurseries and the Learning Support Service, catering for students with ASC.
- Learning Disabilities CAMHS team.
- Physiotherapists.
- School Nurse.
- Dieticians.
- Other medical personnel.
- School transport services.
- Respite and short break provision professionals.
- CDC transition meetings for EYFS and secondary provision.

Collaboration with Parents

In The EVAT, there is a great deal of collaborative working with parents and carers linked to students with ASC. These positive relationships and support strategies enable us to gain a holistic view of the young person with ASC and provide the best possible education and support for their individual needs. These collaborations, as with our collaborations with professionals, are applied on a student-by-student basis.

Our collaborations include:

- Home visits.
- Transition meetings for parents offering training in PECs, TEACCH and sensory issues.
- Parent Forums.
- Communication through FROG app., telephone conversations and in school meetings.
- Parents Evenings.
- Open evenings for transition students.
- Annual Reviews.
- Supporting and advising parents with behaviour/sensory difficulties outside school.
- Provision of Social Stories for home life.

COMMUNICATION POLICY (with emphasis on ASC)

Preamble

EVAT is a large community and therefore, there exists a developing range of language opportunities, strategies and situations that offer access to communications and interactions for every student within the Trust. Through developing inclusive strategies and collaborative working, it is envisaged that all staff across EVAT will become deliverers of appropriate communication strategies and opportunities for their students.

Rationale

Effective communication is paramount in EVAT. EVAT recognises that it is essential to ensure that all students have access to appropriate communication opportunities that enable them to interact, socialise, choose and relay their feelings and needs. In EVAT special schools, many students have been diagnosed with a communication difficulty, which may be defined as a persistent difficulty in the understanding and / or use of spoken or written language.

Students with communication difficulties may include those with impairments, such as Down's Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, Autistic Spectrum Conditions, physical disability (e.g. cleft palate), hearing impairments or neurological disorders. It may also be that a student has a greater receptive understanding than expressive ability.

In students with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD) and Complex and Additional Needs (CAN), there is a great emphasis upon sensory resources and interactions. There is an emphasis on consistency of staffing, to support the development of positive relationships and a secure knowledge of each student is in effect. This ensures that all responses, can be interpreted and acted upon on an individualised basis.

Where applicable, students Speech and Language Therapists' (SALT) reports are followed by classroom staff and regularly reviewed.

ASC students are often challenged by their inability to interact at a social level. They are supported by experienced teachers and Teaching Assistants in taking positive steps to develop these skills and are consistently encouraged to make social interactions, in support of their own individual needs and preferences.

Communication difficulties can isolate the individual and early detection, identification and intervention in communication disorders is essential.

Teaching Strategies

Staff have an understanding, of the child development process and have regular training in disability awareness and new strategies techniques and technologies for communication. There is an emphasis upon personalised learning and planning targets for individual students.

Methods of communication and interaction include:

- PECS. (Picture Exchange Communication System).
- Makaton.
- On body sign.
- Intensive Interaction.
- Spoken language.
- LINK signing.
- Gestures.
- Eye pointing and Eye Gaze technologies.
- Facial expressions.
- Touch.
- Written communication.
- Symbolic "writing".
- Electronic communication including the use of tablets/laptops.
- Reading.
- Communicate in Print.
- Flashcards.
- Talking tiles.
- Colourful Semantics.
- Apps, such as Choose it Maker and Grid Player.

Given the breadth of need displayed by the students, there will be considerable variability in the approaches used, ranging from mirroring the child's sounds (intensive interaction) through to complex explanations. Staff have agreed a range of effective strategies for communicating with students, dependent upon need. These include some strategies that are appropriate for all children within EVAT. The accepted approaches in include:

- Using the student's name first when addressing the student (special schools only).
- Using gesture and non-verbal cues to supplement verbal interactions.
- Using visual cues to support verbal interactions.
- Using positive statements rather than negatives
e.g. "John, walk please" rather than "John, do not run".
- Aiming not to use the word "No" if another can be used such as "finished".

- Use of intonation when speaking to emphasise key words.
- Giving the students time to analyse what is being said and then time to respond.
- Using a calm but firm voice.
- Modelling the student's response to a question or the phrase or statement you think is most appropriate. For some young people, this may be the only way that verbal interaction takes place.
- Where a student engages in repetitive language or questions try a range of strategies such as turning the question back to the student, diversion and redirection.

Considerations

The language used with young people with communication difficulties, should be of a concrete nature (here and now). In many cases, the students have a much higher level of understanding than they can express. Therefore, care should be taken when speaking in front of young people, as they may understand what is being said and a professional manner maintained at all times.

Staff should also be aware that although they may greet students appropriately e.g. by saying "hello", there may not be the expected response; social skills and social interactions may need to be taught and modelled.

It is often beneficial to the student's understanding if the amount of words used is limited to the specific requirements; this is a useful strategy to use with young people with learning difficulties.

If using signing, as a form of communication, be receptive of the student's individual level of understanding and in some cases, sign only the key words. This will support the student in following what is being signed.

Many students with an ASC tend to interpret what we say in a very literal way. They will have problems understanding jokes, sarcasm and turns of phrase, particularly those that use a play on words.

Although these strategies and recommendations are applicable to students with an ASC and in some cases other disabilities, it is important to remember the following:

- Many students cannot cope with over complex language and may need adults in the classroom to limit their interactions.
- The appropriate communication environment needs to be established within each class and for each child.

INTERACTION

As autism is not a physical disability, the condition can be "invisible" to the rest of the world, hence the difficulties faced in raising awareness and fostering an understanding of the condition.

People with ASC may find it difficult to understand how the world and the people around them operate. They may also find it hard to interact. In particular, people with ASC may have trouble learning, understanding and interpreting the unwritten rules of social interaction and relationships that many people without ASC take for granted.

Social Interaction

Students with ASC may find it challenging to interact with others because they may find difficulty in developing the appropriate social skills. Often people with ASC can have problems interpreting the actions and intentions of others and can have difficulties understanding social situations. This may lead to them reacting differently or inappropriately to social norms. They may withdraw completely from interactions in order to cope. One common misconception surrounding ASC is that people with autism choose not to interact with others, in most cases it is likely that, in truth, they do not have the knowledge and understanding to do so. Impairments in social interaction may be expressed in a variety of ways. A student with ASC may exhibit the following characteristics:

- Appearing less interested in people, resulting in difficulties in forming friendships and positive social relationships.
- Appearing not to care about the distress of others and lacking awareness about others' feelings.
- Joining in only if an adult insists and assists them.

- Experiencing difficulties relating to others.
- Making social contacts but being unable to understand “social rules” e.g. standing too close, greeting inappropriately.
- Having difficulty in turn taking and group work.
- Having difficulty with waiting.
- Needing to control conversations and situations to decrease anxiety.
- Have difficulty with adjusting and generalising accepted behaviour in different social situations.

Teaching strategies

- Encourage, model and support children with social interactions with both familiar and unfamiliar people
- Take students into the community and give them experiences of socialising outside of their class group
- Discuss and teach how to understand feelings and expression
- Develop independence
- Use social stories for specific barriers to social interactions
- Teach boundaries and personal space
- Work within small groups
- Consider work buddies
- Develop communication skills, PECS, sign etc as improved communication is associated with confidence
- Games and turn taking opportunities
- Provide visual support and information
- Use of role play to practice social situations

Considerations

- It is necessary for the school to ensure that students are accurately and sensitively assessed to determine appropriate strategies and programmes.
- Remember that each student is an individual and social interactions and intentions need to be in accordance with their behaviours, academic abilities and sensory needs.
- Staff and multi professionals need to know, understand and have awareness raised of the condition and the associated behaviours.
- Staff should talk to the student about what is intended and explain what they need to do, using literal language.
- Misconceptions around ASC should be dispelled e.g. that people with an ASC do not want to interact with others, or that they are insensitive.
- Each student with ASC is unique and thus stereotypical associated behaviours, should be dispelled.
- Staff need to work closely with the home and other agencies such to ensure consistency of approaches.

Repetitive and restrictive behaviours

Restricted and repetitive behaviours are one of the hallmark symptoms of autism spectrum disorder.

These mean the repetitive movements, ritualistic behaviour such as rocking back and forth. In addition, sensory sensitivities are included in the repetitive and restricted behaviours.

Stereotyped behaviours or stereotypy is defined as repetitive body movements that are thought to serve no social function.

Stereotypic behaviours could be exhibited as verbal or nonverbal, fine or gross motor oriented. They could be simple or complex in nature.

Stereotyped (repetitive) behaviours could vary drastically from one person to another. While some repeat words over and over again, others could be exhibiting physical actions such as flicking or pacing.

Stereotypy is repetitive movements. They can be simple behaviours such as rocking the body back and forth, or complex behaviours like marching in place.

They may occur with or without objects. Children with autism usually engage in repetitive, restricted and stereotyped behavioural patterns. These can be in many forms. The child could mouth the objects, they can flap their hands or exhibit repetitive finger movements.

Children with autism can also utter non-contextual repeated words and phrases.

Some other examples to stereotypy include:

- Spinning objects
- Strict adherence to order
- Predictable routines
- Delayed or immediate echolalia
- Stereotypic behaviours do not only occur with individuals with autism. They are common with individuals that
- may have other sensory or developmental disabilities.

Most often, repetitive behaviours are a tool for self-calming however beyond the ability for self-calming here are occasions where these behaviours have a negative impact on the student or those around either by becoming distracting or harmful.

Teaching strategies

- Routines and timetables in place
- Visuals to support such as first and then
- Classroom rules on display
- Use of social stories
- Make use of interests/obsessions to aid teaching and learning
- Further develop the skill
- Use of distraction such as technology but not restricted to this
- TEACCH system.
- Now and Next cards.
- Preparing students for any transition or change.
- Multi-sensory approach.
- Intensive Interaction.
- Daily opportunities for physical activity.
- Rebound Therapy
- Individualised sensory diets.
- Occupational Therapist input and strategies.
- Speech and Language Therapy input and strategies.
- Sensory breaks and use of quiet rooms to support self-regulation.

Considerations

The real question here is whether the repetitive and restricted behaviours should actually be stopped?

Stimming or repetitive behaviours may actually be a way for the individual with autism to calm themselves when they are overwhelmed with certain emotions and sometimes they express their emotions through the use of those repetitive behaviours.

There used to be a view that repetitive behaviours were "non-meaningful acts". However, there is some evidence indicating that this might not be the case.

Therefore, if the act is not hurting the individual or being disruptive to peers, the behaviours could be helping the individual in some manner.

However, if the repetitive behaviours are hurting the individual or disrupting the learning of others, then there are some interventions that can be tried to modify the behaviour in a positive manner such as those mentioned above.

PROCESSING INFORMATION AND SENSORY PROCESSING

As autism is not a physical disability, the condition can be “invisible” to the rest of the world, hence the difficulties faced in raising awareness and fostering an understanding of the condition.

A majority of people with ASC lack flexibility of thought and find difficulties in processing information. Often, they cannot easily grasp the concept that other people have thoughts and emotions of their own. Individuals with ASC can have a unique and often literal way of thinking about people and objects and may not perceive things the way that other neuro-typical people do.

Differences in the way individuals with Autism process information can have a positive impact on their progress and development, enabling students to focus intensely and strive for perfection. However, this can also create boundaries to learning in terms of appropriate behaviours, transitions and organisation, which can negatively affect focus and interaction.

Processing Information

Students with ASC may have difficulties in using imagination to problem solve and predict outcomes on a day-to-day basis. Difficulties link to the ability to reflect back on one's own thinking and learning may be further compounded by limited ability with regard to thinking about experiences they have not already encountered. This includes the ability to engage in pretend play, role-play and take part in curriculum activities that involve abstract thinking and the use of personal imagination. The effect this can have on the student with ASC is that they may have difficulty predicting what could happen next or determining what is expected of them, this may lead to students becoming reliant on establishing routines and rituals to secure a familiar outcome in environments that are constantly changing. Students with ASC can sometimes resist attempts to change and adapt these routines.

A student with processing difficulties may:

- Have trouble following directions.
- Not remember details of what she's heard.
- Appear to be listening but not hearing.
- Often mistakes two similar-sounding words.
- Has difficulty understanding speech in noisy environments.
- Find abstract thinking difficult.
- Have difficulty with transitions.
- Find difficulty in generalising skills from one setting to another
- Have a limited range of imaginative activities.
- Find it difficult to separate fact from fiction.
- Lack an awareness and understanding that other people have feelings, thoughts and plans that might be different from their own.
- Lack the ability to generate new ideas (without suggestions) or make decisions around their next actions.
- Be unable to predict outcomes and events and develop a high degree of insecurity and anxiety.
- Have poor levels of incidental learning and limited imitation skills.

Teaching strategies

- Allow time, this will be variable from student to student
- Repeat instructions and task directions
- Use visuals to support understanding and questioning
- Provide outlines and summaries of lessons, visually if necessary
- Repeat learning to gain confidence and understanding
- Get them to work it out on paper/iPad etc
- One question at a time
- Shorten work expectation and give work breaks
- Consolidate skills in several contexts
- Provide a quiet work area and keep background noise to a minimum

- Be adaptable and differentiate work where necessary to suit the student's learning style
- talk to the student about what is intended using literal language.

Considerations

- Altering the environment even in a minor way can alter the individual's perception of that environment.
- Changes in routine or environment are unsettling for a student with ASC, who may strive to maintain the "sameness" which may result in major incidents/anxieties for the student.
- Each student is an individual and social interactions and intentions need to be in accordance with the student's behaviours, academic abilities and sensory needs.
- Assessment of individual needs and preparation for micro and macro transitions is vital.

Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010)

In preparing or amending this policy, the author has given due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty; that is, they have considered any potential impact on people who share certain protected characteristics. These protected characteristics are defined as: race, disability, sex, age, religion or belief, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity and gender reassignment.