

Primary to Secondary School Transition

The transition to secondary school can be an incredibly anxiety provoking time for pupils and their parents. The school will probably be larger; the pupils will have many teachers in one day and move between different classrooms. This is quite different from the organisation of the primary school. It is ideal, although not always possible, to organise transition visits to the new school. It is important that pupils with ASD visit the school along with their peer group but this can be a very busy day with a lot of information to process. Ideally several visits could be organised before hand to allow the pupils to gather information and familiarise themselves with the school at a quiet time. Even one or two visits would allow the pupil to feel more in control and less anxious when visiting with their peers on transition day.

A resource is included in this pack which provides a transition booklet that pupils can work through and take home with them for reassurance. It encourages them to find a map of the school, take photos, find the canteen/library/office and familiarise themselves with key staff. Pupils can be encouraged to look at the school website at home or school and should be provided with any information and/or the prospectus in advance. This is as important for parents as the pupils themselves.

Pupils and parents should meet with the school's ASD lead or the ALNCo so that they can be reassured as to the ASD specific provision in place. This provision will need to suit the individual. It may simply be ensuring the pupil knows where to go if they have a concern or may involve more detailed approaches and strategies such as timetabled support sessions in an ASD support base and social language groups. This will vary from pupil to pupil and each school will have slightly different systems in place. There is a short, information pack for parents with information about school which may help with transition and home-school liaison There is also a support pack for professionals included that should help teachers and professionals manage a successful transition for those with ASD. This pack should also help staff identify and record strategies used for individuals.

Information gathering from the primary school and from parents can be invaluable and help with advance planning and so prevent all kinds of difficulties. Parents can provide advice as to how their child will respond to certain situations, what may trigger challenging behaviour or self-harm and what may alleviate stress for them. As many pupils in mainstream secondary schools will not have formal Annual Reviews, it is important that close contact with parents is maintained wherever possible. It is also important to note any co morbid conditions as they may impact upon how the pupil is supported.

Tim was moving from a local primary school to secondary school. He was extremely anxious about this transition as were his parents. Parents were invited to visit the school and ask any questions. Concerns about bullying and a calm space to go to when anxious were addressed. Tim then began a series of visits, some with his classmates and some independently. The first few visits involved he and his LSA having a tour of the school, spending some time in the library and meeting other pupils in the mainstream ASD support base. He was given a transition booklet, some of which he completed in the secondary school and some in primary school. The visits progressed well and gradually he appeared more at ease. Soon, his primary school LSA was able to drop him off at school and pick him and he would spend the day with secondary school staff and soon started to feel ready for the transition. Secondary school staff used the transition visits to get to know Tim and to gather information about how to best support him.

- Moving Classes Within Primary School

All forms of transition can be difficult for pupils with Autism. The Primary school environment is, in many ways, less challenging than the Secondary school as staff, pupil and class numbers are smaller. However, when the time comes for the pupil to move classes it can be useful for them to: spend some time getting to know the class teacher, if appropriate choose or know where he or she will sit, be seated near a friend and get to know where belongings and classroom equipment are stored.

- Moving Schools at Primary Age

Those children moving to a new school during the Primary years will need careful support. Advance visits to the school will be essential. Meetings with staff, group activities with friendly peers as well as tours of the school, grounds and time to explore their new classroom will be required. Depending on the age of the pupil, the transition booklet could be used. Older, more able pupils in Years four to six could follow the booklet. Less able or younger pupils could use part of it or go through some of the ideas verbally with younger children.

The First Half-Term

It is advantageous, where possible, if pupils with ASD are placed in tutor groups with friends from their primary school. This instantly removes one stressor for the pupil who will be coping with such a lot that having a familiar face in the room will help hugely. We need to remember that changes to routine can be extremely difficult for those with ASD and so anything that makes this less anxiety provoking is useful.

The creation of Person Centred Plans (PCP) are incredibly useful. In this pack there are sheets which encourage parents and the pupils themselves to share information about: likes/dislikes, learning styles and useful information for teachers to know. Once filled in the information can be put on to a one page PCP , see sample in resource section. This provides an information sheet about the pupil and how best to support them. Ideally these will be posted on the whole school network which allows all staff to access the information. Alternatively, the key information relating to supporting the pupil could be reduced down to a 'bookmark' , see resources, and held as a hard copy for reference. Of course PCPs are only of real use if they are: readily available, referred to by staff and the recommendations followed.

It may be that for the first week or so the pupil will benefit from leaving a few minutes early for break and lunch times to avoid the corridor rush, however, many pupils are desperate to 'fit in' and so would not wish to be seen as being treated differently. Pupils should be shown where and to whom they may go if they have any problems or are struggling to settle in. Individual Education Plan (IEP) targets for this first term should include one for successful transition: naming a safe haven/person who they can contact if needed, a person to monitor transition and any strategies that may help the young person.

It can also be useful to record and monitor how the pupil is coping with social and life skills , their general behaviour and how they are engaging with peers and staff. This can be done annually , and can highlight areas of concern or progress. It provides an overview of how the pupil is getting on and can help with target setting. It serves as a one page record, which allows the teacher to see, at a glance, how the pupil is coping. See resources.

Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

IEPs are ideally used as a tool for target setting, monitoring and identifying tools/strategies to support the pupil with additional learning needs. The IEP should be referred to regularly to ensure targets are being supported and updated when achieved. Realistically, it is not always easy for the mainstream secondary teacher to monitor these regularly owing to time constraints. Where possible, however, the IEP should be easily accessible, on the school, shared network for example as well as hard copies of the IEP in pupil diaries or held by class teachers. Learning Support Assistants may be able to support in the monitoring of IEPs and target setting.

Pupils with ASD may well benefit from a target relating to social skills or language and communication. They need not all be academic targets. It is important to acknowledge that with supported and improved social communication and processing skills, the pupil's academic achievement should improve.

The IEP can be made more accessible to those with autism in various ways. Language can be kept simple and clear and the targets set should be clearly understood and discussed with the pupil. They can be written in the first person to help the pupil understand more clearly and relate it directly to themselves. The IEP itself can include pictures of special interests or be visually pleasing to the pupil.

It is important that those close to the pupil all agree on the targets. Teachers, support staff, tutors, parents and anyone else working regularly with the pupil (as well as the pupil him/herself) should inform the target setting and monitoring of the IEP. Ideally it should be a working document that is referred to regularly, signed and covered in stickers, comments of praise or suggestions for improvement. A sample IEP is included in the resource section. This can be adapted to suit the individual as needed . An additional sheet is included in the resource section that may be used by support staff , or stuck in diaries, to bring to the attention of mainstream teachers. The sheet simply has the targets marked on the bottom and teaching staff are required to sign off when a target is met in corresponding boxes. This can help to ensure mainstream teachers are aware of the targets and are feeding back and monitoring them. It could also be used with parents if social communication or behaviour targets are used. This can then be used alongside the IEP to ensure all parties are communicating and aware of the targets.

Communicating with those with ASD

One of the triad of impairments is Communication. Pupils with ASD may struggle to process language or interpret its meaning. When addressing a pupil with ASD, first ensure you have their full attention. Use their name to gain their attention before relaying information. When communicating:

- keep the language clear , concise and unambiguous
- Be specific about what you are asking or instructing
- Keep instructions simple- multiple instructions will cause confusion
- Some instructions or directions may need repeating or need to be broken down
- Avoid non- literal language, idioms, sarcasm and jokes
- When reprimanding other class member's, name them rather than pointing as those with ASD may mistakenly presume they are being told off.
- If reprimanding a group or whole class , be aware that pupil with ASD may struggle hugely with this if they do not feel they have, personally, done anything wrong
- Remember that pupils with ASD may not be able to process non-verbal cues or gesture. Be specific.
- When asking questions, giving instructions, allow time for processing and for them to think about their answer. Some pupils may need 15 seconds or so
- Slow down speech
- Use visual cues
- Be aware the pupil may be easily distracted by background noise, looking out of window

A resource is included here, to assess and monitor pupils' social communication skills. This rating scale allows staff to assess how the pupil copes with interaction and conversation and to identify any gaps in skills or where main areas of difficulty lie. This can be reassessed annually or as needed to monitor progress or otherwise. The results will provide an insight into the pupils' social communication abilities and highlight areas with which they will need help in lessons or outside of the classroom .

Homework

Some pupils with ASD genuinely struggle with the concept of homework and it can cause huge anxieties. They may tend to compartmentalise the day into two clear parts- home and work. Some pupils see school as the place to work and home the place to relax and so struggle when there is a blurring of the two. The majority of mainstream pupils with ASD, however, manage homework with few problems and, in fact, would not like to be treated differently from their peers. It can help to explain why homework is set and the purpose it serves so that the person with ASD can understand how it can help them develop and enhance skills. It is best not to take for granted that these pupils automatically comprehend why this is important. Some pupils, on the other hand, may place such high importance on the additional work carried out at home, that they spend excessive amounts of time on its completion and become extremely preoccupied with success and achievement. In such cases time limits and clear expectations from the teacher will be necessary.

If possible, it would be useful to ensure that there is a clear system in place for recording homework and all information and page numbers are noted down. Some pupils carry USB pegs and information can be put on there to ensure homework is not missed or misunderstood. It is important that teaching staff do not presume that the pupil with autism has understood verbal instructions about the homework. They may appear to have understood but this may not actually be the case. Writing in the homework book or sticking clear instructions in the school diary will help prevent misunderstandings or incomplete assignments.

Longer term assignments that require various pieces of work to be completed over a continued period, such as Art GCSE coursework or drafting and re drafting of essays, for example, will need to be explained clearly. Teachers will need to check periodically that the pupil has understood what is expected, is not falling behind schedule and is working to a sufficient standard. It may be that windows of time are created within the school day are created , where the pupil can complete homework with some support. If this is not possible , then parents can support their children by having specific times when homework is completed and a limit set as to how long the homework session is to last. Tony Attwood(2007) suggests that use of a timer can be useful to ensure the child knows how much time they have to complete the work.

Special Interests

Pupils with autism can have an excessively intense interest in activities or objects. They are likely to spend less time partaking in social engagement than their typically developing peers and, the special interest may fill this time and can develop into an all consuming fascination. It can be difficult to find a balance with this as it is important that the special interest does not completely dominate and prevent learning in school and other experiences/activities out of school. On the other hand, pupils must be given time to indulge in these interests as they can help to reduce anxiety and provide a reassurance and routine in an otherwise unpredictable world. In addition, the special interest may be one of the few things that provides the pupil with genuine pleasure and can help them to engage with peers, and impress them with their vast knowledge. To ban the interest completely may lead to disengagement in school and reduce social interaction opportunities with peers.

Provided the interest is not harmful then it can be useful to allow restricted access to it. This can be done by timetabling access to the interest, using it to teach the curriculum/project work or setting aside a time for the pupil to research their interest. Some pupils struggling to engage or becoming anxious and restless could benefit simply by having a photograph or printed picture of something to do with their special interest in the back of their diaries or in their bags. Glancing at the picture can sometimes provide relief to their anxiety instantly.

Tom is an 18 year old with a special interest in buildings. His knowledge about the worlds' tallest buildings is amazing and his ability to draw them equally so. Tom would talk incessantly about his favourite topic , question everyone and anyone about it and spend any free time drawing buildings or researching them. The focus on his interest was so intense that if staff did not have the time to talk with him about it he could become anxious and self harm or run out of class. This was addressed in three ways. Talk time cards were made and kept in the class. Tom would be given one of these whenever he wanted to discuss his interest but there was not the time to do so. He then wrote down a comment and handed it back to his teacher. She then ensured he had time at the end of the lesson to talk with her about the buildings. Sessions were allocated on the timetable for special interest time , so that he knew each day he would have chance to look into his interests. Tom's teachers also tried to use his special interest to engage him in the curriculum and this was very successful. They used buildings to get his interest and sustain it in a Geography project and Numeracy.

Anxiety

Pupils with ASD often feel calm and secure when things are familiar and routine. When there are changes to the structure of the day: the usual teacher is away or there is a change to room, pupils with ASD can become anxious and feel out of control. Other causes of anxiety can include: making friends and forging relationships, feeling different to others, exams, concerns about future employment and coping with adolescence/bodily changes.

The very nature of the impairments associated with ASD mean that certain social situations can prove problematic for these pupils. Feeling the need to 'fit in' with peer groups and socialise but not really wanting to or knowing how, can be very stressful for pupils with ASD. Those social intricacies that we may all take for granted such as: eye contact, personal space and avoiding monologues in conversation can be problematic for those with ASD. This can mean that social interaction is awkward and they may find it difficult to develop social relationships.

In the classroom it is important to be mindful of this when setting group tasks. The pupil with ASD may feel unable to join in and end up isolated. Giving roles or specific tasks for each group member can help or visual cues and reminders as to what is expected of them. The most important point is to be clear about instructions and expectations and ensure these have been processed and understood. If pupils with autism are expected to stand up and give a presentation to the class then they may become extremely anxious. This could be supported by giving them plenty of notice and allowing the pupil to present to a smaller group. Use of a power point and/or visual aids can help the pupil stay on track and give them another focus.

Pupils with autism can find unstructured time such as break and lunch times incredibly stressful. If the pupil is unable to build up relationships with peers then break times can be lonely and anxiety provoking. In some cases buddy systems can help but often mainstream pupils with ASD find this difficult to cope with as they do

not wish to be perceived as being different. Involvement in school clubs can really help these young people feel part of a group whilst able to spend time doing something they enjoy, perhaps a special interest.

Ideally, all pupils with ASD should receive some form of social skills teaching. In receiving the diagnosis it is acknowledged that they experience difficulties with social skills and communication to some degree and this will need support. In reality, fitting this in to the busy mainstream timetable is not easy, however, at times withdrawal groups once a week or even once a fortnight can provide much needed support. In small groups the pupils can use role play and group discussion to work through different aspects of social communication. Recording conversations or videoing them and playing them back can really help pupils with ASD self monitor. There are many excellent social skills programmes available. Where access to social skills groups is not feasible, it may be that individuals will need some incidental support and guidance throughout their school years. This may be through IEP targets, mentor support sessions or strategies to support in the mainstream classroom.

Adolescence is a turbulent time for young people and for those with autism, it can be incredibly stressful. An exacerbation of challenging behaviour, increased anxiety or depression can be observed in young people with ASD as they struggle to cope with the onset of adolescence, increasing pressures at school and the difficulties associated with ASD. Teachers need to be aware of this and monitor and pass on to parents any marked changes to behaviour whether that be more challenging behaviour or more withdrawn.

In a specialist autism centre, it is a lot easier to monitor individuals, how they are coping, changes to behaviour and stress factors. There is more time to implement strategies and work on a 1:1 basis or in small groups to tackle anxieties. In the mainstream setting, the pupil with ASD may appear to be coping and exhibiting no challenging behaviour but may in fact be going home and becoming distressed. Close links with parents is vital where possible, to ensure all parties are informed and aware.

If it is possible to identify the cause of anxiety then steps should be taken immediately to reduce it. Whether that be through referrals to external agencies such as Educational and Clinical Psychologists or by altering timetables and increasing withdrawal time with support. Tools to facilitate communication, visual prompts to aid thought processing or recall and plans or strategies to help the pupil feel in control can all help immeasurably. Frequently, small changes can make a huge difference. Some sheets to support pupils experiencing anxiety/ problem solving are included in this pack

Some pupils may require time to reassure and comfort themselves through behaviour such as: flapping, rocking, tapping etc. It can help to build a time and place for this into the day's schedule.

A 'First Aid Kit' or 'Tool Box' could be made to support the child's anxiety. The box is filled with objects that reassure and calm them. One could be made for home and school. The objects could include:

- a picture of a family member or special interest
- an ipod with favourite music on
- a DVD
- a social story
- a favourite book/magazine/poem
- small activities
- Squeeze ball

The box (or bag/folder) should be made with the child. Encourage them to share what makes them feel better when they are anxious, sad or afraid. What do they like to do, listen to or see. Different problems or worries may need different tools to fix them. The box can be filled with these items for them to access during calm time. Alternatively, a smaller selection of items could be used in school. The items can be changed as needed.

If a box is not possible, then the pupils could be encouraged to design their own toolbox. Drawing pictures and writing down things to do when anxious. This can be referred to as needed. A template for this can be found in the reference section. It can be used to plan what goes into the box or used as a paper version of the tool box.

A feelings jar can also be a good way of helping a pupil express emotions or process how they feel. I adapted this idea from the Winston's Wish Memory Jar. Initially, you sit down with the young person and ask them what things make them anxious, write them down, four or five things. Then ask them to think of five things that make them feel happy or calm. Assign colours to these things. Then, taking fine table salt, pour it into a small jar with a lid. You can buy these in plastic or use baby food jars. Then , pour the salt into four (or five) piles and using a chalk pastel, roll or rub it into the salt until it colours the white salt your chosen colour (s). When all colours are done, carefully pour the salt into the jar, one colour at a time to create layers. Top up the jar with plain salt and cotton wool, tightly so that the layers stay in place. Then screw on the lid. This can also be used as a teaching aid to help pupils discuss and understand emotions. Getting them to express how anger makes them feel, for example, then choose an associated colour. See references for a template to support this activity.

Sally is a very bright young girl with autism who attended a full mainstream timetable. She attended most lessons independently and appeared to be coping well. Her mother made contact with the school to say that her behaviour at home had been deteriorating over the last term and she had begun self harming and having outbursts of very challenging behaviour. In order to tackle this, the timetable was altered and one lesson removed. In its place, a 1:1 anger management session was established and catch up time allocated. In addition, she was given a key ring (Resource 8) with traffic light colours on to indicate to support staff and teachers if she was feeling anxious and needed to leave. All staff were notified about the changes. An IEP target was amended to encourage her to communicate her anxieties to staff. It took some time for her to calm and there were still occasions where she was anxious around the time of exams, however, staff noted a huge improvement following the implementation of these changes.

Behaviour

This can be a contentious and problematic area for the classroom or unit teacher to manage. It is important to understand that people with ASD do have a condition that means they may respond and act differently from their peers. The fact that they have difficulties with some aspects of language and probably struggle with social relationships, will mean that they can be perceived, often incorrectly, as being: rude, offensive, obstructive or disruptive. It is no easy task at times, to establish what behaviour is challenging as a result of the condition, and what behaviour requires attention and perhaps reprimand. The pupil with ASD should not be punished for challenging behaviour associated with his or her condition such as: not remembering kit or equipment, drifting off task, struggling to cope with group work or failing to process information or answer questions. Support strategies are required in such cases to ensure the pupil's behaviour is not as a result of not understanding or being bored (not having enough motivation to engage). It can be useful to use visual cues and clear explanations. Address them by name to ensure you have their attention, repeat and check content and language has been processed and understood. Try to use motivators and incorporate special interests if possible to engage the pupil. Check that the pupil is not experiencing anxiety or sensory concerns.

It is vital that teachers and support staff remember that challenging behaviour can be a form of communication and has a purpose for the individual. It may be that the pupil with ASD is unable to communicate in any other way or that their attempt at communication has manifested in challenging behaviour. It could be a result of fear, anxiety or a reaction to change. However, if the behaviour is rude or defiant, the class teacher does need to send a consistent message to the pupil and the whole class that such behaviour is not acceptable. In such instances it is important to introduce strategies that can work at classroom level and possibly others that can be used outside of school.

When a young person is exhibiting challenging behaviour, and de-escalation techniques such as distraction, calm support, humour have not worked, try:

- Not to raise voice, ask questions or reprimand at this point
- Use minimal language but when necessary keep it simple and calm
- If possible direct young person to a calm, enjoyed task (many feel this is rewarding bad behaviour but if a pupil is truly distressed then they are in no state to cope with reprimands and they will be unable to listen or process. Far better address concerns/sanctions when calm).

See the Working Things Out resource for addressing concerns after the event.

It may help to:

-Try to establish what is causing the behaviour. What is the pupil trying to communicate? Have there been any changes at school? (supply teacher, change of

room, a subject topic that is distressing them?) Or at home? (a bereavement, moving house, sharing a room with a sibling?)

-If nothing is obvious, then communicate with all teaching staff, parents and external agencies, if they are involved.

-Try to establish any patterns in behaviour. Are there certain days, times, rooms or people who seem to trigger the behaviour? Note any antecedents or consequences to the behaviour. This may help to establish causes for the behaviour.

-Try to facilitate communication. Support the pupil in explaining how they are feeling and why and what they think may help

-Think about what interests and motivates the pupil and consider how this could be incorporated into a reward programme

-‘Choose your battles wisely’ If the behaviour is impacting on the pupil’s learning or that of others, if there is a risk of harm to the pupil or others then staff will need to intervene. However, if the pupil is rocking, fiddling with pens etc. then this may be keeping him or her calm and whilst it may be a little distracting it does not necessarily require a reprimand.

-Remain as calm as possible

-Time out in a designated space or room could be used

-Pupil could have Time Out or Traffic light cards. They could leave a red card on their desk which would indicate they needed to leave class. An orange may mean ‘I am not feeling great –don’t push me.’ The meaning of the colours and the cards will need to be agreed with the pupil before implementation of this strategy. See resource. Traffic Light Cards can be used by the teacher as a quiet reminder about levels of behaviour, a resource is included, or by the child to facilitate communication about how they feel or how they are coping. They could be cut out, laminated and fixed to a key ring for easier use. A blank traffic light resource is included for teachers to customise to suit the pupil and situation. A sample Time Out card is also included and should be adapted to suit the needs of the child.

-Talk time cards, included in resource section, can be very useful for pupils who struggle to stay on task or talk about their special interests for long periods of time. The teacher can give the pupil a card to reassure them that they will be listened to at a certain time which can be written on the card as needed. Alternatively, the pupil can be encouraged to give a card to the teacher or LSA. This allows them to: acknowledge their desire to talk and the topic they wish to discuss, to be reassured that it won’t be forgotten but that they have to wait for a time.

-Be mindful of the strategies you implement. Monitor them and assess whether they are working or are they reinforcing the challenging behaviour- see below.

-Praise the good!

-If a strategy is decided upon it can be attached to or form a part of the IEP. All staff could and should then follow the same approach. Consistency is key.

Jane experiences periods of anxiety. At times this can manifest as challenging behaviour: refusal to complete task, feigning illness, ripping up work or shouting/leaving the classroom. It was decided the pupil would have the traffic light card system to indicate when she was becoming distressed or was very angry. She would then put the cards on the desk and be permitted to leave for cool down time. It soon became apparent that her challenging behaviour and this strategy was being used to enable her to get out of lessons rather than to help her calm down. This method was stopped and approaches put in place to make sure she had advanced notice of changes and lesson content and she was given some calm time built in to her timetable rather than using this as a reactionary strategy .

Sensory

Our senses help us to understand the world around us. They help to keep us safe, to learn and understand. Young people with autism can experience difficulties with sensory processing, that is, processing the sensory information that they experience. Those experiencing high (hyper) sensitivity may try to avoid sensory overload. They may struggle with loud noises, background noise, strong smells from the canteen, the flickering of lights or movement of water on tiles at the swimming pool. Those with low (hypo) sensitivity may seek stimulation or sensory input by rocking, spinning or flapping. They may need to squeeze, tap or jab objects or themselves, wave hands in front of eyes or lick objects. People with ASD often experience difficulties with sensory processing but each may have very different needs in relation to this.

Try to:

- Be aware of the individual's sensory issues
- Consider the environment. Are there any factors that could cause sensory overload
- Question behaviours. If the pupil is distracted or continually tapping could there be a sensory issue related to this
- If a pupil is flapping, tapping etc. It could indicate increasing anxiety. They may need time out. Sometimes 'fiddles', blu-tack or a squeeze ball can be given to help this
- Warn the pupil of any changes to room or activity that may involve different and potentially unsettling experiences
- Use of ear phones can help with noise sensitivity, time out can be timetabled to allow for low stimulation time or physical activity could be time-tabled. Consider individually. Think of the person's interests, needs and what could help them.

Bullying

Bullying is an unfortunate reality of school life for some pupils. Pupils on the autism spectrum may be perceived by their peers to be unusual or different and sadly this can lead to instances of bullying. According to the *national Autistic Society*, in their '*Make School Make Sense*' report (2006), over 40% of children with autism have been bullied in school. Ideally the pupils with ASD will find a friend or group of friends with similar interests with whom they can spend break times. Lunchtime clubs can provide a welcome haven for pupils who find themselves bullied during unstructured time. It also provides them with the opportunity to mix with pupils who have similar interests. A Buddy system can work, however, this depends very much on the pupil with ASD being open to this idea.

Educating the wider school, staff and pupils is vital to prevent bullying. Demystifying the condition and helping others to understand how it affects people can help. It can be that people being scared of the unknown. Once they understand the condition, they tend to feel less wary and less inclined to hurt or make fun of those with ASD. Of course, this is not always the case. Many times the way a pupil with ASD reacts to trigger words or comments can make them obvious targets for bullies who like to see their unusual and often extreme reactions.

Whilst raising awareness and facilitating understanding of the condition is vital, teachers can often find themselves facing an ethical dilemma if the pupils are adamant they do not wish any action taken or any attention drawn to them. At the very least, pupils with autism need to be offered a place to go where they can feel safe and a named member of staff who they feel comfortable talking to. It must then be decided how to tackle the bullying and this will require close liaison between school staff including: behaviour support teachers, autism support staff, support assistants and anyone else involved with the child, including parents. At times whole school approaches such as assemblies, tutor group talks or awareness raising can help. A consistent message needs to be given to all pupils that bullying is unacceptable and the school's sanction system should be explained to them and followed consistently.

See section on bullying in Transition Pack and case study below.

Several instances of bullying had occurred in the school and over the following year this was addressed in a variety of ways. A group of pupils got together and created booklets '*Ten things pupils from the Autism Centre Wished you Knew*' for students and a slightly different one for staff. This was an awareness raising exercise and leaflets were handed out in all Year 7 tutor groups. Pupils were offered a space to spend their break times that was supervised by staff. Pupils who were found to be taunting those with autism, were spoken with by the ASD lead for the school and the Behaviour Manager to ensure a strong message was sent home about bullying and how autism affects people. A group of after school Drama pupils agreed to create a production about autism and bullying to convey the impact this can have. This was delivered to mainstream pupils during assemblies and they plan to deliver it to the feeder primary schools.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is a whole school concern. It is important to be aware that those with autism may struggle to communicate with others or be unable to articulate emotions, particularly when distressed. All pupils should be made aware of Safeguarding procedures. They need to be aware:

- What constitutes a safeguarding concern
- That they have the right to feel safe and secure
- Who they can go to with a concern

A sample Safeguarding sheet is enclosed as a resource here and can be used to discuss Safeguarding, displayed in class and given to the pupil.

Dinner and Break Times

Dinner and break times can be difficult for those with ASD who may find unstructured time difficult to cope with. The often noisy and chaotic environment of the school canteen, where food choices can be limited, may not be ideal for these pupils who may choose instead to have their own lunch from home. Sensory needs, must be considered and it may be necessary to find an alternative place for pupils to eat. Mainstream pupils with ASD will often find a space that suits them to eat their packed lunch. Some pupils are entitled to free meals but have very limited diets. It can help to have a copy of the canteen's menu in advance so that the pupil can choose their preferred meal. At times, canteen staff will keep food aside or put on extra/alternative meals when the pupils' needs are explained to them.

It can help greatly, to allow pupils with autism to leave two or three minutes early from lessons. This can allow them to escape the corridor crush as large numbers of pupils make their way to the canteen. It also permits them a small window of opportunity to get their food without having to cope with the pushing and jostling of the dinner queue.

Those pupils who struggle with social relationships can find the 'free' time of break and dinner time lonely, confusing and painful. They will often not be able or, will choose not, to tell others that this is how they feel. If school staff become aware that a pupil appears to be isolated then it is important to communicate those thoughts to the pupil's tutor or Head of Year. If a pupil is identified as being isolated, then arrangements could be made for them to access a support base, spend time in the library or join a club where special interests can be shared.

It is important to remember that whilst some pupils may seem socially competent, be good communicators and academically able they may struggle hugely with forging relationships with peers. It is also important to note that some pupils may be bullied or taken advantage of owing to their social communication skills or special interests which may be perceived as odd or unusual. Some pupils may tolerate this feeling that at least they are part of a group even though they are unhappy. If the pupil could join a social skills or relationship development group where topics of: recognising bad characters, when to say no, how to cope with social interaction

could be taught , modelled, acted out or discussed would be ideal. Alternatively, a teacher who has a good rapport with the pupil could talk this through and could, perhaps, involve a sensible peer to spend some time with the young person with ASD.

Carl was part of a mainstream autism centre base. He was a bright young man but who did not like to be outside at break times and found the unstructured times difficult to cope with. His teacher spoke to the Head of the Behaviour Centre in the School who ran a Yu-gi oh club. Carl joined this and thoroughly enjoyed it. A computer club was then set up in the autism base and his friends from mainstream were invited to attend. On other days he was able to go to the library or read in a quiet space.

School Refusal

Some pupils may struggle with attending mainstream school or even Special Centres or bases within the school. This could be owing to difficulties with transitions, anxiety , bullying or sensory issues. A gradual and carefully planned transition could help with this initially. Lots of short visits to gradually reassure the young person. If the school refusal begins apparently randomly or after a settled period then there will almost certainly be a reason for this. It may be a problem at home or change in the home environment or could be a school concern. Often, as examinations approach pupils with autism can experience extreme anxiety. This may not be displayed in school, they may appear to be remaining calm, but it is very common for pupils with ASD to experience heightened anxiety during adolescence and increased work pressure further exacerbates this. Some pupils, simply find the pressure of trying to forge and sustain social relationships too much and cannot cope with going to face a school day full of communication and social intricacies that seem foreign to them.

The most important point here, is to make sure that if the pupil's absences are increasing or school refusal is an issue, that an attempt is made to try and find out the cause. It may be that a classroom change would solve distressing sensory issues or being able to access a chess club and lunch time removes anxieties about being alone during this time. If, the cause is more complex or difficult to ascertain, then there are a few strategies that could help, however, this will depend on the individual circumstance.

It may help to:

- Ensure clear lines of communication with parents
- -Try to get the pupil to communicate their reasons for not wishing to attend. Sometimes pupils are happy to write their reasons down or talk to a certain teacher about it
- Speak with all teachers to get an overall picture of how the pupil has been coping in the classroom, academically and socially.
- -If it is possible to make tweaks to timetables, classrooms or home routines that will help then do

- Involve peers/friends if possible by creating opportunities for the pupil to spend time during the school day with friends
- Be creative with timetabling and accept that it may take some time to reintegrate the pupil. Offer time with friends, clubs, time for special interests, off site groups with pupils from the school or trips and visits
- A gradual approach , where the pupil comes in for one lesson, a favourite lesson/subject or a break time and increase gradually
- Access any external agency provision available to the pupil
- If there is a Centre base or withdrawal room available for some of the time, this may help. It can be enormously reassuring to know that they have somewhere to go at times of distress or that they do not have to battle through a whole day

Class layout

Given the varying nature of the subjects taught at secondary school, classrooms can look very different. The displays, seating layout , lighting and resources may all differ hugely. There are certain features of the classroom, however, that if put in place, can help the pupil with autism focus, learn and remain calm.

- Avoid noisy heaters, flickering lighting and ideally have carpet on the floors to avoid chair scraping
- Displays can be a good learning aid but avoid cramming and information overload
- Seating layout will depend on the class dynamic and number. Many pupils with autism cope better with sitting in rows and near the front of the class. This avoids the social pressure of group seating a little and minimises distractions. If the seating is in groupings of pupils, try to sit the person with autism by calm, supportive pupils.
- Equipment, trays and other learning materials could be labelled and kept in the same place.
- Check that the pupil can see the whiteboard, has a clear pathway to the teacher if help is needed and minimal distractions near the place of work.
- Ensure pupil can view his/her timetable so that they are able to see how the day is to unfold. These can be stuck into the back of diaries or stuck on work stations.
- keep workstations, tables clear and uncluttered

Pupils may need guidance in finding the best place to sit in each classroom to minimise distractions and sensory overload but to ensure they can see and hear the teacher. Where possible, discuss this and visit rooms in advance. Familiarising yourself with the pupils' individual sensory needs and making the necessary adjustments can help the pupil access learning and prevent challenging behaviour

Examinations

Exams can be particularly difficult for pupils with ASD for several reasons, namely:

- Teachers start discussing the importance of exams and encouraging revision early on in the Secondary School. Those with ASD may struggle with revision in the home as they consider home to be release and relax time and school the place to work. Any blurring of those boundaries can be confusing and stressful for them.
- Exams are completely out of the routine which ASD pupils are often reassured by. The rooms are different, the staff can change, the rules are altered and the exam paper is obviously an unknown
- Adolescence is a particularly difficult time for pupils with ASD and we often see an exacerbation in behaviour. GCSE exams fall in the midst of adolescence which means the pupils are dealing with two major stressors without the social/communication/general understanding tools that the typically developing adolescent has.
- If the pupil is not entitled to concessions then exam papers can be difficult to process for people with ASD. Any questions referring to emotions or feelings may confuse pupils as these are things that are not always clear, understood or expressed by them. Questions involving inference and deduction can also prove problematic as our pupils tend to find it difficult to 'read between the lines'. If it is not literal, they may well struggle.
- Exam paper questions with more than one part to the question can confuse our pupils or impede processing as they struggle to break down the question or miss it out completely.
- The exam room can be distracting from a sensory point of view. Chairs scraping in an otherwise silent room could be physically painful for the person with ASD. Also, pupils getting up and leaving the room before the end of the allotted time could completely distract the pupil with ASD
- Pupils with ASD may not have peer relationships in the typical sense. They may struggle to discuss their feelings and emotions as others do. Without this outlet and sharing of anxiety we need to be mindful that they may not show or say it but they could be very anxious about approaching exams.
- If the pupil is really not coping at this point then it is important to check that the timetable is not too full and expectations are not too high.
- - Be aware that when addressing the whole class and issuing warnings
- That revision is essential, they, as a class, aren't working hard enough or if they don't pass their exams they may not succeed, that the person with ASD may take this literally and personally and this can cause huge anxieties.

Ensure pupils have all of the exam concessions that they are entitled to, by checking with the ALNCo/SENCo. There are various concessions, including: extra time, use of word processors, use of a scribe the presentation of the papers (colour) and modification to the language of papers

In this pack there is a sheet with exam tips for the pupil with ASD which can be handed out. Other ways to help are:

- Help the pupil create a revision timetable that they can cope with
- Help the pupil know what to revise by giving clear instructions or a list of topics.
- If the pupil is entitled to extra time/reader/scribe ensure it reflects their normal working practice and that they are aware
- Wherever possible a smaller exam room with fewer pupils and distractions will help.
- Ensure they have a clear timetable of exam days/dates/times as soon as possible- showing extra time if applicable
- Go over the filling in of the front of the paper
- Try plenty of past papers focusing on breaking down questions, recognising non-literal language and types of question
- Notify parents/Head of Year if you notice any changes to behaviour which, however subtle, may indicate anxiety or not coping

It is important to remember that however able the pupils may appear and however intelligent they may be, it is very likely that the pressure of exams coupled with adolescence will mean they will struggle at some point. It is vital this doesn't go unnoticed.

A Note on the Curriculum

Schools and communities that embrace the principles of 'entitlement' and 'inclusion' need to have a clear understanding of the individual learning needs of pupils with ASD which takes into account cognitive learning styles and areas of strength
(Mesibov and Howley, 2003)

It is useful for the teachers of all subjects to consider the difficulties that pupils with ASD experience and how this may impact on the learning in those lessons. Ultimately we want these pupils to have the chance to access the curriculum wherever possible but have to be aware that at times this can prove difficult from a time and financial perspective.

It may be that by using support strategies, pupils are able to achieve or partially achieve the learning outcomes of a lesson. Differentiated work and creative use of resources can help pupils access the curriculum and pre-warning of lesson content and how the term's work will progress can help reassure, prevent distress and enable their learning. Sometimes simple, easy strategies that take some pre-planning but cost nothing can make a huge difference to the young person with autism.

Teachers are busy, managing, planning and delivering education to numerous children, daily. Understandably time is often restricted, support staff not always in

classes as needed and funds not available for resources. Whilst this is acknowledged, some of the following general strategies may help the pupil hugely and in the long run save the teacher time and result in a calmer classroom environment:

- Provide pupil with bullet points of main content of lesson / how the lesson will progress
- Provide pupil with an overview of how the term or half term's work will be delivered. This does not have to be lesson by lesson which could cause problems if there are changes to the plan, but a general overview may be useful
- If the pupil knows what to expect before the next lesson, he/she could prepare or do some background reading
- If there are to be changes to the room, teacher or planned content, where possible let the pupil know
- Some pupils are very able but their output can be low. Use cloze procedure, writing frames, task planners or the PC to enable them to complete the work without having to complete large amounts of written work which can be a struggle.
- When possible and if necessary, be flexible in how the work is achieved. The aim is that the pupil is included, is completing work and doing so successfully. It may be that, in order to achieve this, the method, delivery or task has to be tweaked or altered considerably.
- Pupils with ASD may find it difficult to focus on more than one thing at a time such as listening to the teacher and copying notes from the board
- Reassurance can be very helpful. Some pupils with ASD can be distressed if work is not completed or is not perfect. Reassure them they can have extra time to complete or have a task explained again.

- Remember some pupils with ASD may also have fine motor difficulties, sensory difficulties which will reduce their output and/or attention control
- Use plenty of visual aids including: diagrams, video clips, task lists.
- Remember, just because pupils can demonstrate understanding of a skill in one setting or lesson, this does not mean they will be able to transfer this skill elsewhere
- When using the whiteboard avoid putting huge amounts of information up at one time and perhaps more importantly do not wipe it off before the pupil has copied all the information down. The sense of the incomplete or 'unfinished' task can be very difficult for pupils with ASD to cope with.
- Orange and green cards (or cards with pictures/words) can be used to inform the teacher 'I am ok' or 'I need help'. This can be very useful and could be introduced as a whole class system if preferred
- Use special interests to encourage pupils to engage and enhance their learning

Art, Music and Design and Technology

- The practical nature can mean changes to routine and structure. This can be difficult for those with autism. Marking on a timetable when there is a practical session, a room change or change in teacher can help
- Any longer term projects, assessments or deadlines should be clearly written down and given to the pupil. Expectations need to be clearly explained and written down. The pupil may need reminders.

-Sensory difficulties may cause difficulties. Some young people with ASD are very sensitive to noise and so they may not be able to work near machinery. Some may struggle with the texture or touch of paint or food. Adjustments can be made that are reasonable and relatively easy to implement. The pupil could wear gloves, work in a screened off area, visit the class at a quieter time to carry out their task. Small changes can enable the learner to achieve the outcome without becoming distressed.

Physical Education

- Some excel in sport but many will struggle, particularly in group games.
- Some pupils struggle to cope if others don't follow the rules of the game or become upset when they lose or make a mistake.
- The learning environment may be problematic for pupils who may not cope with getting muddy outdoors or be distressed by the acoustics of the sports hall, for example.
- Allow plenty of time for changing
- Instructions may need to be broken down and repeated
- Task could be role played or demonstrated to aid understanding

Modern Foreign Languages

Some pupils with ASD have difficulty using their first language. They may struggle to process what others are saying or express themselves. Learning a new language can, for some, be very difficult. Use visual aids, ICT and role play and recording to help consolidate learning. Speaking in front of the class may be difficult for some pupils on the autism spectrum.

Transition from Secondary School to Further Education

The concerns for parents and pupils are similar here and the workbook provided here could be used in a similar way, as a resource to support transition visits. Careful consideration will need to be given to the courses chosen and the logistics of getting to the new provision and moving around within it. It can also be invaluable to enable contact between parents and pupils with the College or University SEN /ASD lead during a transition phase well in advance of the move so that a point of contact is established.

Ensure sound links with Careers advisors and the College ALN manager are established. Interviews for College or University placements need to be handled sensitively and those with ASD need to be given the opportunity to meet those interviewing them and see the interview room prior to the interview itself in case of sensory issues and to help them feel less overwhelmed. Too many new faces in unfamiliar surroundings can be extremely daunting. Universities often now offer mentors to support pupils with ASD and open days or residential visits for those approaching school leaving age.

Trips and Visits

Trips and visits out of school involve changes to routine and experiences that are out of the ordinary. As a result, pupils with ASD may not feel able to take part. This will depend on the type of visit and the individual with autism. Often, with careful planning and preparation, however, those with ASD are able to access school trips or at least part of them. The following strategies may help when preparing a young person with ASD for a school visit:

- Pre visit beforehand if possible, to identify any potential risks or triggers which may cause difficulties for the young person
- _Ensure appropriate risk assessments are in place and Health Care Plans are consulted
- Use the internet and show the pupils the place to be visited.
- Liaise with parents and discuss. Can they foresee any problems? What may help their child feel secure?
- Prepare the pupil- a calendar or timeline, to count down days to the visit can help
- Ensure the pupil knows times, dates, means of transport, who will go and generally what to expect
- Give them the chance to ask or write down any questions they may have
- Allow them to have with them any objects that help them feel safe, secure such as: earphones and music, a favourite toy or a computer game
- Ensure close contact with parents and allow pupil to speak with parents if needed
- Ensure appropriate staffing

Parents are often anxious during such situations, so a text or brief phone call can be reassuring.

Overnight visits can take a little more planning but can be extremely rewarding. In addition to the above:

- A transition booklet could be made preparing the pupil- sticking in photos, noting down the itinerary and timetable of the day(s) and evening, names and numbers of those on the trip and who to contact.
- Ensure pupil has mobile phone
- Ensure sleeping arrangements are secure and that pupils can contact staff if needed
- If the first time on the train/bus, a visit to a station and smaller journeys on the transport could be organised
- Ensure pupils who require medication have it with them and that the usual safety procedures and logging are in place and all consent forms are signed. Take a copy of the Health care Plan with you.

Two staff took four, sixth form pupils on the train for an overnight stay in a University Halls of Residence. The trip was organised for young people with ASD who may wish to progress to Further Education. The aim being, to experience a taste of University life. Close liaison with the programme managers meant that risk assessments were thorough and detailed information packs were sent home. The children had the chance to look at the website and were given a timetable of events. They had the chance to ask questions. The children seemed quite confident with train travel but were given times and made aware of the journey length, stops and changes. Pupils were allowed to bring games, music, books and anything they wished to make them feel comfortable. They all had staff phone numbers and clear outlines of what to do if they got separated. The trip went very well despite other passengers refusing to move out of the pre-booked seats on a busy train for pupils to sit down! Overall the report back from parents and pupils was hugely positive. The pupils grew in independence and confidence and had the chance to experience staying away from home, shopping and cooking a meal and learning about university life. It took a lot of planning and preparation but staff reported that it was worth it just to see the pupils cope so well and learn so much.

Setting Up an Autism Support Centre in a Mainstream School

Why set up a Centre base in a mainstream School?

Pupils with ASD may struggle to cope with a full mainstream timetable and need some skills and lessons to be taught in a Centre base. Social skills teaching, communication skills groups or booster sessions may be taught in the Centre base to support the pupil holistically, ensuring all their specific learning and autism associated needs are met.

The mainstream environment can be unpredictable and noisy and pupils with ASD can find it difficult to maintain focus in such situations. In addition they may have other learning needs, difficulties with organisation, motor control or sensory issues which can compound the problem. The Centre base can then prove to be a place of calm and solace.

Unstructured times such as break and lunch times can be stressful for those with ASD, who find social interaction and social communication difficult. They may experience loneliness or be bullied. The Centre base, again, provides a calm space to retreat to when things become 'too much'. Clubs or quiet time can be provided.

Getting it right

The Centre base would need to be based in the mainstream school, easily accessed by the pupils and not sited next to school kitchens or toilets where cooking smells and cistern sounds can distract. The room itself, would need to be uncluttered. Taking into account the potential sensory difficulties that these children may experience, there should be low levels of stimulation. Notice boards should be informative but not cluttered, the class layout should allow for plenty of space between seating, avoiding adding too much furniture. Avoid heaters or lighting that buzzes or drones as this can be unbearable for some pupils. Ensure, wherever possible, that floors are covered with carpet or lino to minimise background noise of

chairs and feet on the floor. Wall colours should be neutral or calming, avoiding loud patterns or stimulating colours.

Ideally, there would be enough space for a small area for pupils to relax, with beanbags or soft chairs. This is an area they can use to read and relax or to calm down if distressed. There would be work bays or tables where pupils could work independently but a social space where group work or clubs could take place. Access to computers and learning materials is required and lockers or a space for bags/personal belongings. Pupils' timetables should be displayed or accessible.

Staffing

The base needs to be staffed all day so that if a pupil is in distress they can make their way to the base, knowing it will be open and that the staff member present will be familiar to them and will understand the condition.. The unstructured nature of break and play times can be lonely and / or problematic for those with ASD. It is important where possible that the base be open so that they have somewhere to go. If this is not possible as staff need their breaks and cover may be scarce, then find an alternative place for those pupils to go.

Staff require some training in ASD. This is vital as the pupils (and parents) need to have faith in the support, to know that the condition is understood and that the support will be appropriate. Staff need to feel that they have a sound understanding of the condition and how it can impact on learning and the individual generally. They should be made familiar with approaches and strategies that can be useful. Most importantly, staff need to make the time to get to know the individual: their likes, dislikes, condition (s), sensory difficulties, special interests, level of function, behaviour that can manifest and everything that makes that pupil who he or she is. This knowledge and understanding of the pupil will contribute hugely to their success as well as to the confidence of staff when dealing with these individuals. Staff ratios will depend upon class sizes and the nature of the pupils accessing the base. If pupils with challenging behaviour or more complex needs are attending, then more than one member of staff will be needed.

Entry and Exit Criteria

Schools or Local Authorities may differ when determining criteria for entry into the Centre base. Certainly, pupils with a diagnosis of ASD or probable diagnosis (ie. On diagnostic clinic waiting lists) would be prioritised. Pupils may be considered for a place if:

- Behaviour in class is problematic and support strategies have not been successful
- School attendance is dropping
- Pupil's output is low/learning is deemed to be decreasing or of a lower standard
- parents report difficulties at home (as a result of distress at school)
- It is felt that ASD needs are not being sufficiently met by a mainstream curriculum alone
- It is felt that Social Skills, communication, motor skills or other support group or individual teaching is required

Some pupils may be notionally attached to the Centre, accessing it only as needed, others may access the Centre for break times and just for occasional support groups and there may be some situations where pupils spend a few hours or more a day in the base. When pupils have been given a place, it is then important to meet with parents and key professionals to determine the way forward and to establish the aim and the desired outcome. The group then need to meet periodically to monitor progress and eventually to reduce time in the base or for the pupil to return fully to mainstream.

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