

## **AUTISM POLICY**

### **1. Autism Policy Statement**

- 1.1. Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them.
- 1.2. ASC is a spectrum condition, which means that while all people with autism share certain difficulties, their condition will affect them in different ways. People with autism may also experience **over- or under-sensitivity** to sounds, touch, tastes, smells, light or colours.
- 1.3. Students at Churchward School who have a diagnosis of autism have additional Learning Difficulties. This policy sets out the support provided for our ASC students through an awareness of the following considerations:
  - a. Structure / organisation of activities / resources.
  - b. Sensory.
  - c. Be understanding.
  - d. Curriculum.
  - e. Teaching and Learning.
  - f. Communication.
  - g. Behaviour support.

### **2. Structure / Organisation of Activities / Resources**

- 2.1 Churchward School will offer a highly structured approach, based predominantly on the Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH) principles of classroom organisation, personalised schedules, individual work stations, physical activity and a commitment to engaging with the interests of the student in order to enable them to access the learning experiences. In classes where there are fewer students with autism, it should be remembered that they may still require high levels of structure and predictable routine and these needs must be catered for within the wider classroom setting.
- 2.2 Drawing on the Structure, Positive approaches and expectations, Empathy, Low arousal, Links (SPELL) framework, particular attention is given to ensuring the following:
  - a. Supporting Churchward School students with autism through structure.
  - b. Maintaining positive approaches and expectations.
  - c. Developing empathy for Churchward School students with autism.
  - d. Adopting a low arousal approach.

- e. Creating and maintaining links between the Churchward School student, their wider support networks and the community.

2.3 The curriculum and processes of the day are modified to ensure each individual knows what is going to happen and what is expected of them. The use of personal and class timetables enable students to feel secure and to cope with change that may or may not have been predicted. This also aids the development of flexibility of thought by reducing dependence on rigid routines, enabling students to plan for change and adapt to different experiences. Staff can support this by using visual resources to enable students to know what is expected of them and what is going to happen throughout the day. Classes or individual students should use an appropriate visual timetable and support students in accessing this independently. Staff should also use transition cards to support students when moving around the school or to other activities.

2.4 Coping with Free Time: Students with autism need structure to continue throughout the day; they will find it difficult to cope with the idea of **free time** and **self-occupying**. It is essential to teach this vital skill but this doesn't happen simply by giving students free time. Structured reward time is perfectly acceptable; giving choices between concrete activities is also useful but saying **you can do what you like** is unhelpful. Students will need direction and support to access **play / leisure** activities and staff must be mindful both of students retreating into preferred obsessional activities which may be isolating and counter-productive (often this involves the computer!), or students struggling to access activities alongside others.

### 3. Physical Environment

- 3.1. Students with ASC learn best when the environment is calm and ordered in such a way so as to reduce anxiety and aid concentration. There should be as few distractions as possible with specific areas designated for specific activities within the classroom and across the school. Visual cues to support understanding of this are useful.
- 3.2. Classroom displays should take into account the need for the environment to be calm and not excessively stimulating so as to distract students from being able to focus on the task at hand. However, within reason it is important to challenge the boundaries and tolerances of students with autism to develop flexibility of thought and change within the environment.
- 3.3. Attention should be paid to the potential for sensory processing difficulties which may result in increased anxiety and challenge for individual students. This may mean that lighting, décor and furnishings may need to be adapted and staff should pay attention to potentially aversive or distracting stimuli, for example noise levels, colour schemes, odours, lighting and clutter.

Similarly, the need for security and safeguarding in some classes means doors must remain mag-locked although in some classes it is appropriate to encourage and build on independence skills and allow greater flexibility and autonomy for students where appropriate.

- 3.4. Full use of the outside spaces and break-out areas is expected for those students who may require additional space to manage their own behaviour as well as for those who require sensory stimulation (see sensory considerations below). For those students who use the break-out spaces as a **time-out** space, it is important to follow the procedures set out in the behaviour policy. .

#### **4. Sensory Considerations**

- 4.1. Students may have additional sensory processing difficulties; this may mean that they need extra time to process information if sensory distractions are present. Staff should be mindful of potentially aversive or distracting stimuli, for example noise levels, colour schemes, odours, lighting and clutter. Information should be given with clarity in the medium best suited to the individual with care taken not to overload or bombard.
- 4.2. Students with ASC may require additional sensory stimulation or sensory reduction techniques in order to aid concentration and enable them to access the curriculum. At Churchward School we support students to meet these sensory needs in an appropriate way.

Churchward School staff should build these considerations into their planning and ensure that the curriculum and routines of the day are flexible enough to meet these needs. This may mean that additional physical activity is appropriate at certain times of the day or that students participate in desensitisation programmes.

- 4.3. Churchward School staff should be mindful that sensory integration difficulties could have a significant effect on the ability of a student to access the curriculum. It is the responsibility of staff to be creative in finding ways to overcome this, not only through desensitisation but also through adaptation of activities and resources to ensure that the learning objective can be met. Sensory integration difficulties must not be allowed to become a barrier to learning.

#### **5. Be Understanding**

- 5.1. Approach the teaching of students with autism from an empathetic perspective. Knowing what it is that motivates or interests them but importantly what may increase anxiety levels. To make every effort to understand and relate to the experience of the person with autism will underpin our attempts to develop communication and reduce anxiety.

This requires staff to remain calm and as far as possible to act in a predictable manner. Churchward School staff should always respond to challenging situations in an analytical manner, asking what is at the root cause of the behaviour in order to proactively plan to prevent it in the future.

#### **6. Curriculum**

- 6.1. The curriculum is tailored to best meet the needs of the students, enable them to engage with learning activities and develop flexibility of thought. As students' progress throughout key stages four and five, where possible the scaffolding is removed as students prepare for life in a world, which is not autism aware. However, the commitment to physical activity, a sensory curriculum,

individualised learning pathways and a functional curriculum remain at the core of the curriculum for students with ASC.

- 6.2. Churchward School staff should use the curriculum as a vehicle for developing the core values of **Independence** and **Interdependence** and should remember that these are far more important than curriculum content. Students within the same class, even in those classes that are within the ASC provision should follow individualised programmes that are developed according to their need. This may mean additional **Personal** and **Physical Development** sessions, participating in activities such as Pennyhooks or horse-riding, additional social swim activities or community skills time.

## 7. Teaching and Learning (See also Curriculum Policy)

- 7.1. In addition to the core standards and expectations set out in the Teaching and Learning policy Churchward School staff should keep their understanding of autism at the forefront of their minds when planning lessons and supporting learning. This means that consideration should be given to:

- The length of activities and the ability of students to concentrate on the learning objective.
- The construction of groups and the balance between individual and group work.
- Sensory issues which may mean accessing learning activities is difficult.
- The need for physical activity across the day.
- The importance of making activities functional and meaningful. Autistic students may not respond to **work for work's sake** - there needs to be a clear purpose to the task.
- The need to focus on what interests the student and construct tasks around this.
- The importance of structure and routine across the day and during activities as well as the need for continuity and consistency of staffing, resourcing and environment.
- The importance of visual support to aid communication and support routine and structure.
- The inclusion of activities which encourage the development of flexibility of thought, challenging students' routines in a managed way in order to support students in developing the ability to cope when things don't go to plan.
- The importance of developing social understanding, not only in supporting students to know **how** to act appropriately in social situations but to understand **why** this response is appropriate. Teaching **social understanding** supports students to develop their own social ability.

- 7.2. Churchward School staff should select targets which support the development of the core learning values of **Independence** and **Interdependence** as well as considering which area of the **Triad of Impairment** the target is intended to

support. The Triad of Impairment identifies the three areas in which an autistic person typically experiences greatest difficulties, these are:

- Communication.
- Social Interaction.
- Imagination.

All students will have different needs and areas that require greater focus than others and these should be considered when planning lessons and considering target setting.

## **8. Communication** (See also Communication policy)

- 8.1. Churchward School staff should remember that experiencing communication difficulties is a key part of being on the autistic spectrum. In addition to this, students at Churchward School are likely to have an additional diagnosis of severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties and this makes the development of systems effective communication essential.
- 8.2. Students with autism will require visual support in order to enable them to both understand what is being asked of them and to effectively communicate their needs and wishes. Even students with seemingly well-developed language skills may struggle to *use* this language in a **functional** way and also may find it hard to follow verbal instructions unless they are broken down into small steps and / or supported with visual clues. Below are five key principles to support effective communication:
- a. Always ensure **their** preferred means of communication are available (PECS books, switches etc).
  - b. Keep **your** verbal instructions to a minimum – use signs and symbols to support them.
  - c. **Slow down and keep quiet** - Many students need time to process information – allow them time to process questions and answers and don't be afraid to sit in silence awaiting a response. Repeating the instruction or saying it louder will only cause the student to struggle to process the original information.
  - d. Always **expect** acceptable communication - our students will lose skills if they are not constantly reinforced – don't fall into the trap of responding to challenging behaviour **if you know the student can** communicate more effectively – remember we are preparing them for life and not everyone will be able to interpret their needs in the way we can when we know them well!
  - e. **Build in** as many opportunities for communication as possible – this may mean sabotaging the environment (putting things out of reach etc). Aim to manufacture **at least 30** PECS exchanges in a day.
- 8.3. Remember that students with autism may well only gain a literal meaning from what you say and not understand a phrase or metaphor. For example, asking a student to **take a seat** may leave them wondering where to take it, rather than the simpler instruction of **sit here**.

## 9. Behaviour Support (See also Behaviour Policy)

9.1. Where necessary, Churchward School students have a positive handling plan which details potential challenging behaviour which may be displayed and appropriate prevention and response. Challenging behaviour can take many forms and is usually always a form of communication. Churchward School staff must always ask **why** a behaviour has occurred and take steps to introduce measures that may prevent this behaviour from re-occurring. This may take time and may not always be initially successful but consistency and continuity are essential in order to support students to better manage their own behaviour.

9.2. Below are some general principles to help to support students with autism to manage their behaviour:

- Ensure students have an effective method of communication available at all times.
- Ensure that you have an understanding of their sensory needs and enable these needs to be met where necessary.
- Ensure that the environment, curriculum and approach are modified (as outlined above) to reduce anxiety levels.
- Keep language to a minimum and use symbols to support what you are saying.
- To adhere to the positive handling plans, including strategies for de-escalation and prevention.
- Always reward positive behaviour and deliver a reward if you have promised it. Never reward negative behaviour.

## 10. Professional Training and Development and Staff Information Resource

10.1. There is a great deal of expertise on autism within the Churchward School staff and wider Brunel SEN MAT Staff. There are many Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities relating to autism. Your Headteacher should keep you informed of these or you can ask the CPD coordinator.

10.2. All staff should read the Autism Fact Sheets

10.3. Suggested Websites for further information:

- **The National Autistic Society:** A comprehensive site with excellent explanations, ideas for support and links to local organisations. [www.autism.org.uk/](http://www.autism.org.uk/)
- **The Challenging Behaviour Foundation:** Lots of good advice and case studies. [www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/](http://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/)
- **The Sensory Integration Network:** Good for information about Sensory integration difficulties and advice about therapy and support. [www.sensoryintegration.org.uk/](http://www.sensoryintegration.org.uk/)

- **Autism Independent UK** Another comprehensive site with good explanations and case studies. [www.autismuk.com/](http://www.autismuk.com/)

#### 10.4. Suggested Reading List:

- a. National Autistic Society Monthly e-newsletter (see Churchward School Website for links to this).
- b. Promoting Positive Behaviour -Sharon Paley.
- c. Autistic Planet - Jennifer Elder.
- d. Turn Around Bright Eyes – Liane Gentry Skye.
- e. A Book About What Autism Can Be Like - Sue Adams.
- f. An Anthropologist on Mars - chapter in the book of the same name by Oliver Sacks

#### 11. Policy Review

- 11.1. This policy has been produced in consultation with staff, and students at Churchward School and has the approval of the Governing Body (GB). A copy of this policy is available to all who request it. It will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that the aims, objectives and adopted strategies remain relevant to Churchward School.

Signed ..... Headteacher

Signed ..... Chair of Governors

Date .....