Supporting Autistic Students

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Pre Reading

Inclusion

- **Inclusion in education is about valuing all children and the environment that best suits their learning equally. This might be best attained within a mainstream school, or a special school. The aim is to increase the participation and reduce the exclusion from the local school communities and the culture that accompanies them.**

- In order to be fully inclusive, schools might need to restructure their teaching and learning practices to accommodate individual learners. Barriers to learning should be reduced and this can benefit the whole school community. Where differences between students exist, they should be viewed as learning opportunities for the whole school and teachers should be fully trained and resourced adequately in order to implement any differentiation required within the classroom.

- There are many definitions of inclusion. [Lynch and Irvine (2009)](#) describe 'authentic inclusion' as:

- "a unified system of public education that incorporates all children and youths as active, fully participating members of the school community; that views diversity as the norm; and that ensures a high-quality education for each student by providing meaningful curriculum, effective teaching, and necessary supports for each student."

Additional definitions of inclusion in education from the Index for Inclusion, involve:

- Valuing all students and staff equally.

- Increasing the participation of students in, and reducing their exclusion from, the cultures, curricula and communities of local schools.

- Restructuring the cultures, policies and practices in schools so that they respond to the diversity of students in the locality.

- Reducing barriers to learning and participation for all students, not only those with impairments or those who are categorised as `having special educational needs'.

- Learning from attempts to overcome barriers to the access and participation of particular students to make changes for the benefit of students more widely.

- Viewing the difference between students as resources to support learning, rather than as problems to be overcome.

- Acknowledging the right of students to an education in their locality.

- Improving schools for staff as well as for students.

- Emphasising the role of schools in building community and developing values, as well as in increasing achievement.

- Fostering mutually sustaining relationships between schools and communities.

- Recognising that inclusion in education is one aspect of inclusion in society.

Definitions – Pre 2013

- In Europe, Lorna Wing described a triad of deficits in;

  - social communication,

  - social interaction, and

  - social imagination.

- The American Psychiatric Association, however, described a triad of impairments in;

  - social communication,

  - social interaction and

  - the presence of restricted and repetitive behaviours and interests.
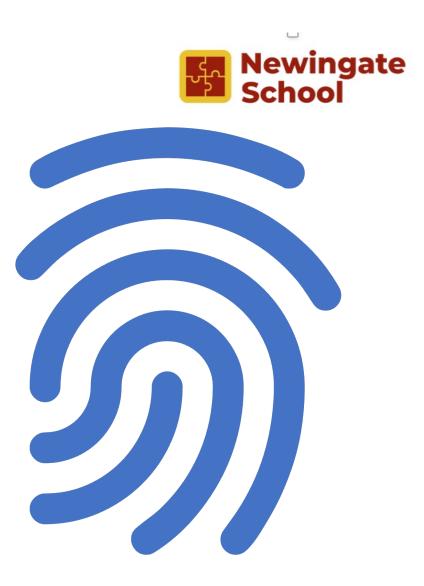
Action Plan

Name of Pupil:

Staff Member:

Area of Focus *AET Framework*	Key Challenge/s *What is the specific challenge you wish to address?*	Planned Strategy *What are the planned strategies/pedagogies you plan to implement?*	Review Point *When will you review the impact of the strategies (e.g., date or timeframe)?*	Progress/Impact of Strategy *What has been the impact of the strategies introduced? What evidence is there to support this?*	Next Steps *What steps will you take to further embed/develop the strategy or to ensure any positive impact is sustained?*

Has this plan been discussed/shared with relevant colleagues/professionals and parents/carers as well as the pupil? YES/NO

Screening for Autism In Older Children…

- A checklist to identify whether a child should be referred to a specialist for an evaluation for autism is the AQ10-child, for children aged 4-11.

- There is also an adolescent version for those aged 12-15.

- Both of these require parents/ guardians to rate their child as well as education staff.

Autistic Strengths
This is not to suggest that all autistic people have a savant-like super ability (as in the film Rain Man). Rather, some cognitive strengths tend to be more prevalent in the autism community. A worldwide survey of over 200 autism experts identified the following list of autistic strengths:

- Attention to detail

- Strong sense of morality (eg honesty, lack of judgmental attitude, etc)

- A preference to work on repeated or monotonous tasks

- Expertise in a specific area

- Mathematical abilities

- Creative talents (eg look at the world differently)

- Artistic skills (eg music, drawing, visual arts)

- Visual perception

- Intellectual functions

- Technical abilities (computer skills, engineering)

- Trustworthiness

- Loyalty

- Kindness

- Good memory

AET Progression framework

Challenging behaviours

Challenging behaviour can be defined as culturally abnormal behaviour of such intensity, frequency, or duration that own physical safety, or that of others, is seriously jeopardised.

It is behaviour that would prevent access to community facilities.

Types of challenging behaviour

Aggressive challenging behaviours can be categorised by the focus of the aggression:

- *aggression towards others:* Aggression towards others includes behaviours that physically harm others, such as hitting, kicking, biting and pinching others, as well as verbal aggression, which includes screaming, cursing, threatening others, yelling insults at others.

  - Intrinsic (i.e. inborn) and/or extrinsic (i.e. induced) tantrums are often included in definitions of challenging behaviour and have been defined as stamping on the floor and screaming.

- *aggression towards oneself:* Self-injurious behaviours include head banging, hitting body parts, banging other body parts into objects, self-biting, self-pinching, self-scratching, pulling finger or toe nails, stuffing items into body orifices, self-induced vomiting, teeth grinding, pica (eating non-food things like paper or hair), drinking an excessive amount of liquids, and aerophagia (swallowing too much air).

- *aggression towards objects:* Finally, property destruction is commonly defined as behaviours that damage objects.

Addressing challenging behaviours

- Keeping a log of the challenging behaviour can help identify the scale of the issue. A log should contain details of the frequency, duration and intensity of the challenging behaviour. Here is an example of a log:

Briefly describe the challenging behaviour:

1. Over the past week how frequently has the challenging behaviour occurred? *Please circle a number*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Almost never	Seldom	About half the time	Usually	Almost always	Always

2. Over the past week how intense do you think the target behaviour has been? *Please circle a number*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No intensity						Maximally intense

3. Over the past week, how much time would you estimate the child has spent engaging in the challenging behaviour (and any of its consequences, including worrying about it)?

_____ minutes, _____ hours

- Many professionals agree that it is crucially important to try to understand **WHY** the child is engaging in the challenging behaviour.

- Understanding what the function of the behaviour is called a *functional analysis*. It is possible that whilst the behaviour is challenging for a parent or teacher, it is not challenging for the child.

- A clinician may do a more thorough functional analysis, but one way of you thinking about this could be to complete the following table :

WHY do you think the child engages in the challenging behaviour? (place one tick per row)

	Never	Almost never	Seldom	About half the time	Usually	Almost always	Always
To gain attention from others							
To get something they want							
To get away from something they don't want							
Because they get pleasure from it							

Positive behaviour support and challenging behaviours
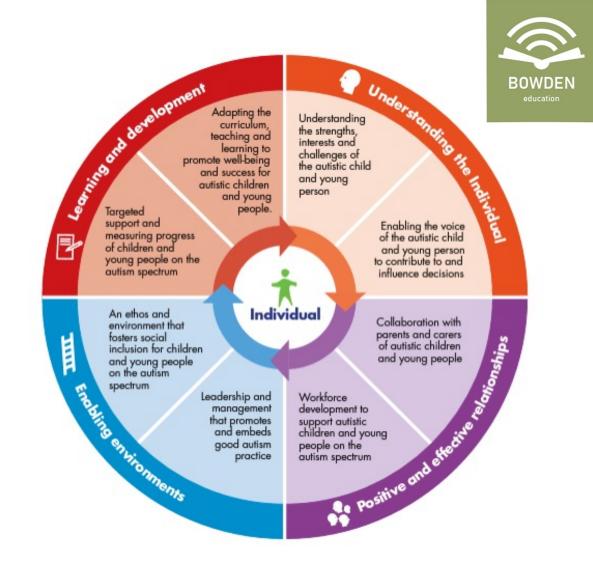
- Have a look at this video about challenging behaviour and positive behaviour support from BILD (British Institute of Learning Disabilities).

- The video explains that all behaviour happens for a reason, and challenging behaviour is no different.

- It introduces 'Positive Behaviour Support' (PBS), a person-centred and values-based approach. The aim of PBS is to understand why the challenging behaviour is being exhibited (for example, someone may be lonely or overwhelmed) and the triggers which may lead to the challenging behaviour (for example, loud noises).

- With this knowledge, a plan can be created to help improve quality of life.

Maintaining an inclusive learning environment…	Multi-sensory Approaches, Including ICT…	Working with Additional Adults…	Managing Peer Relationships…
• Layout: seating allows all pupils to see/hear the teacher • Acoustics: background noise is reduced • Use of Wall Space: resources and displays are accessible and encourage independent use.	• Use of ICT • Use of preferred learning approaches, such as auditory or visual • Use alternative ways of communication e.g. symbols, images… • Use alternative ways of recording and assessing.	• Other adults as partners not teachers • Commitment to pupil independence • Joint planning and review.	• Flexible grouping • Buddying/peer tutoring • Circle of friends
Adult-Pupil Communication…	Formative Assessment/Assessment for Learning…	Motivation…	Memory/Consolidation…
• Language used is positive and respectful. • Careful praise/correction • Prepared questions for individuals/groups • Use of preferred communication style. • Giving time to think.	• Choice of objectives/success criteria/peer assessment. • Expectations/challenges • Communication issues	• Engagement/enjoyment • Rewards/praise • Including pupil strengths/interests • Relevant contexts • Encouraging learning from mistakes • Use of ICT for fun • *Can-do* ethos: readiness to *problem-solve.*	• Developing use of a range of memory aids. • Helping pupils devise their own strategies for remembering.

Think about your child's school (if a parent/ carer) or your school (if you work in a school). How many of the 8 principles of good practice for general autism education do you think have been embraced by the school?

NAS SPELL philosophy

- All interventions within NAS Schools are based upon the well established and evidence based NAS SPELL philosophy (evaluated by the Tizzard Centre at the University of Kent). The philosophy was developed through 50 years experience in autism specialist education and is based on ethos of respect for every student and encapsulates best practice and inclusion.

- Structure (to reduce anxiety resulting from rigidity of thought)

- Positivity (recognise autistic intelligence to enhance self esteem)

- Empathy (seeking to recognise the perspective of the autistic people)

- Low arousal (to reduce anxiety related to sensory differences)

- Links (to other intervention and to the wider community)

- Whilst the SPELL philosophy in the classroom may be particularly beneficial for autistic students, it is also likely that everyone in the class will benefit from the SPELL philosophy. It is important to note that adaptations made for specific groups can be universally beneficial for all students.

- Autism Wales has a very useful (and free) set of guides for mainstream secondary schools, for mainstream primary schools and in Early Years settings.

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