



The Autistic Spectrum – Approaches to facilitate inclusion in mainstream schools

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Contents

What is autism?	1
Key issues for successful inclusion	5
Transition planning	9
The organisation of the classroom	14
Organisation of the learning experience	17
Learning style	21
Language and communication	24
Social aspects of learning	27
Emotional aspects of learning	31
Working with parents/carers	37
Appendix 1: The family of autistic spectrum disorders	39
Appendix 2: Pathological demand avoidance syndrome (PDA)	40
Appendix 3: Support and training available within Hampshire	43
Appendix 4: Resources	45
Resource and activity sheets:	51
Resource sheet 1: The autistic spectrum	52
Resource sheet 2: Characteristics of autism	53
Resource sheet 3: The spectrum of impairments	54
Resource sheet 4: Transition checklist	55
Resource sheet 5: Individual pupil profile	56
Resource sheet 6: The pupil with pragmatic difficulties	57
Glossary	59

What is autism?

Introduction

An increasing number of young people in our schools appear to be identified as autistic, having an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) or an autistic spectrum condition (ASC). When young people are said to have Asperger's Syndrome, does this mean the same thing? When a young person acquires such a diagnosis what are the implications likely to be for their learning and social development? Some facts about autism and the autistic spectrum may help to make the picture a little clearer.

'Autism' is not a label, it is a signpost. (Rita Jordan, November 1995)

The label alerts us to the direction of search we take to identify the needs of an individual. It does not, in itself, define those needs. (Kate Ripley, November 1995)

Autism is defined as a disability that affects the way that a person communicates and relates to people around them (National Autistic Society). It is a complex developmental disorder that affects more boys than girls, in the ratio of 4:1. Autism is described as a spectrum disorder because of the wide variation in the intensity of the condition and the associated learning difficulties that may accompany the disorder. The generic term autistic spectrum disorder includes a wide range of young people from those who have severe learning difficulties and limited communication skills to young people who are cognitively able and have good verbal skills, such as those described as having Asperger's Syndrome. In the UK, but not necessarily in the USA, Asperger's Syndrome is considered to be a part of the autistic spectrum. Recently, (2007) Simon Baron-Cohen has led a change of emphasis from defining autism as a 'disorder' or medical condition, to a focus on the social learning aspects of the condition. The alternative designation autistic spectrum condition is, therefore, now commonly used.

Autism is not a new condition. The changling children of myths and legends may well have been autistic, while accounts in early literature, such as the stories about Brother Juniper, a follower of St Francis, clearly describe someone with limited social understanding. However, the term 'autism' (from the Greek 'autos' meaning 'self') was coined as recently as 1943 by Leo Kanner to describe young people who we would now identify as severely autistic. The same term was used by Hans Asperger in 1944 to describe young people that we now identify as having Asperger's Syndrome. It was as late as the 1970's that Asperger's work was translated from the German and the two bodies of work were brought together to define the autistic spectrum disorder.

In 1976 Dr Lorna Wing and Judith Gould identified a **triad of impairments** which still provide the framework for the current diagnostic criteria which are:

- the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV, 1994) used in the USA (DSM V is due for publication soon)
- International Classification of Diseases: World Health Organisation (ICD-10, 1994) used in the UK.

The three core impairments, i.e. the triad of impairments, are:

- social interaction, social relationships
- social communication and language
- social understanding: imagination and 'Theory of Mind' (ToM) (see page 27).

The consequences of this triad of impairments are manifest in ways that affect relationships with other people. In the school environment these may include:

- making and keeping friends
- a limited response to verbal praise, which is the usual person-based motivator for young people
- difficulties understanding the views of other people which makes it hard to work, learn or play as a member of a group
- a need to keep control in social situations
- making sense of the social world: seeming to lack 'common sense'
- problems with the less structured times of the school day
- difficulties with the social use of language and the pragmatic aspects of communication.

Since Wing first defined the triad of impairments, other researchers have queried the scope of the original descriptors and proposed additional descriptors.

Thus, Jordan (2005) states that a lack of imagination per se in autism is a myth and that social imagination is the area of impairment. She would add an impairment of:

- flexibility of thinking and behaviour.

Attwood (2005) would emphasise:

- restrictive interests and the need for routine and consistency.

The early descriptors also underemphasised:

- sensory processing problems.

Sensory processing problems are frequently experienced by many people on the autistic spectrum and may make the everyday physical environment stressful because of sensitivities to stimuli such as light or noise.

These additional areas of difficulty are likely to affect wider aspects of life within a school environment.

Lack of flexibility of thinking and behaviour is likely to lead to:

- distress at, and problems with, change
- difficulties with the generalisation of learning.

Restrictive interests and the need for routine and consistency is likely to lead to:

- difficulties with motivation when the adult agenda does not correspond to the person's interests
- reluctance to try new activities.

Sensory sensitivities may lead to:

- reluctance to move round the school in busy corridors and/or join the playground areas

- reluctance to enter large, noisy spaces, for example the canteen
- anxiety about being very close to others, for example sitting in a group on the carpet, standing in line
- potential distractions from noise, lighting, smells, textures which other people can easily ignore.

These sensitivities tend to be very idiosyncratic and need to be analysed individually for each young person.

Young people with Asperger's Syndrome share the same core problems with others on the autistic spectrum, both the triad of impairments and the proposed additional descriptors. However, they present as more verbally competent and academically able. One view is that young people with Asperger's Syndrome do develop some awareness of the point of view of others, i.e. a Theory of Mind, (see page 27) albeit later than neurotypical young people. They do want to interact with peers and make friends but are unskilled in their approaches so that they can experience significant social difficulties.

The incidence of autism

An early study by Gillberg & Gillberg in 1989 found that 21:10,000 had a diagnosis based on the triad of impairments. A survey by the National Autistic Society carried out in 2003 gave the figures of 1 in 86 young people. A survey of local authorities carried out in March 2003 indicated that 87% reported an increase in the incidence of autism.

Studies quoted in the Lancet in 2006 give figures of 44:10,000 (2001), 116:10,000.

It is only possible to speculate about the reasons for this apparent increase in the incidence of ASD. Certainly in the 1980s when less was known about effective management of the condition, multi-agency diagnostic teams would say that a young person had 'autistic features' rather than giving an autism diagnosis. The pendulum may now have swung in the opposite direction. In the current climate, many young people with speech and language difficulties who have secondary difficulties with social communication are at risk of an ASD diagnosis.

Fashions in diagnosis may change but there may also be a genuine increase in the incidence associated with environmental causes or other causes which are not yet clear. The coincidence of the emergence of autistic 'symptoms' around the time of vaccination for the MMR is most likely to be due to the way in which language develops as numerous well controlled population studies carried out across the world have failed to find a link between ASD and the MMR vaccination.

The aetiology of autism

What causes autism?

In the past about one third of young people with an autistic diagnosis had suffered either pre-natal trauma for example maternal rubella, or a post-natal trauma such as encephalitis or meningitis. Whilst the relative incidence of these conditions has declined with medical advances during the past 20 years, they are still well represented among those young people who have a severe form of the condition and are educated in specialist settings. Among this population, the ratio of boys to girls does not show the characteristic 4:1 ratio.

For the majority of young people with autism there is a strong genetic link which is shown by family aggregation studies and twin studies. The human genome project has given valuable clues about the gene sequences on which chromosomes are associated with autism. The more likely genes include those on the long arm of chromosome 7 while different gene sequences

are involved in language difficulties. In 2003 Baron-Cohen described how testosterone levels in utero may affect the development of social communication, social interaction and aggressive behaviour. Thus, high levels of testosterone are associated with more limited social and language skills at two years and four years of age. These studies of the complex interaction between genes and hormones may, in time, provide the key to understanding the physiology of autism. The identification of mirror neurons in the human brain in 1992 is also of great interest to neurologists studying autism.

Autism may co-occur with any other type of disability, either physical or psychological. Thus, a third of young people with ASD also have some form of epilepsy. However, Positron Emission Tomography (PET) scans reveal that 90% of people with ASD show different patterns of brain activity from neurotypical people whether or not they have ever had an epileptic episode. Certain conditions do appear to have a particularly high coincidence with ASD such as Fragile X, Tourette's Syndrome and Tuberous Sclerosis.

Outcomes for young people on the autistic spectrum

It is difficult to predict outcomes for young people on the autistic spectrum because of the range of learning and social difficulties that they may experience. However it is clear that the strategies to support their learning and social development that have been developed over the past 20 years can be very effective. Strategies which work well in a mainstream setting are considered later in these guidelines.

The majority of longitudinal studies show that the core impairments associated with the triad persist into adult life but their manifestation changes over time. Also, as adults there are more options and choices available. Thus young people who found working as a member of a group very challenging in school may choose to work in ICT or finance where social communication is not integral to their adult role. Adults with ASD may be found in a range of settings from sheltered accommodation to independent living with a partner and family, depending on their abilities and the extent to which the manifestation of their ASD disadvantages them socially

There are now some interesting accounts of what it is like to be autistic, which are included in the references list on page 48.

Key issues for successful inclusion

Managing levels of arousal

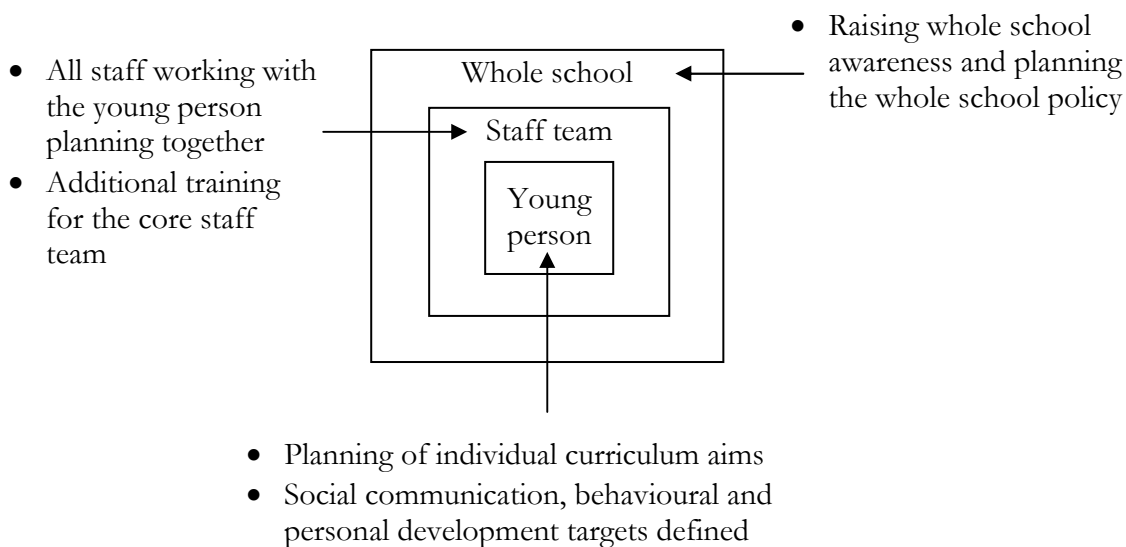
Young people on the autistic spectrum often find it hard to manage their levels of arousal. They can quickly become over-excited or over-stimulated (hyper-arousal) or unresponsive (hypo-arousal). We may need to help them to regulate their levels of arousal by using techniques to calm or stimulate, for example by using physical exercise as learning breaks.

Keeping anxiety levels within manageable limits needs to underpin all our work with young people on the autistic spectrum. Temple Grandin, an able adult with Asperger's Syndrome, explained that for someone with ASD getting through a normal day can induce as much stress as presenting for a finals examination or an interview does for a neurotypical individual.

Anxiety is particularly high for people with ASD because:

- the physical world may be unpredictable because of their difficulties with generalisation (see Central coherence on page 21)
- to them:
 - changing the position of the ornament may make it seem like a different room
 - changing the sequence of tasks may make it seem like a different activity
 - changing the colour of equipment may make it seem like a different task.
- a technique, strategy or process learned in one lesson may not be recognised in the context of a different subject, in a different room or when introduced by a different teacher
- they may experience differences in sensory perception such as an increased sensitivity to noise, light, and touch
- the filtering and prioritising of sensations that most people can ignore may be hard, for example, the ticking of a clock may intrude and disrupt what the young person is trying to concentrate on
- the young person may find it hard to focus and sustain attention on topics that another person, such as the teacher, has selected
- the social world is very confusing and difficulty predicting the behaviour of others may lead to a young person with Asperger's Syndrome finding other people aversive (see Theory of Mind on page 27).

A whole school approach to the management of ASD



Source: Caroline Simmons, *Advisory Headteacher for autism, Oxfordshire*

The provision of a calm, predictable environment requires:

- awareness raising and planning by the school
- planning for the particular needs of the individual young person.

The whole school

- **Commitment to inclusion** - this is needed by the whole staff team and should be set out in the school's special educational needs policy
- **Awareness of autistic spectrum disorders** - it is important that all members of the school staff are given some awareness training as the autistic young person will meet all members of the school community not only his or her teachers. The national Inclusion Development Programme (IDP) materials for ASD have been available to all schools since March 2009 and the Department for Education (DfE) have strongly recommended that schools use these materials for professional development. It is important that where whole school strategies for management are agreed and implemented, staff should understand the reasons for the strategies and the importance of a consistent response
- **Clarification of the roles and responsibilities of the staff** - the school should designate one named person, usually the special needs co-ordinator (SENCo), to co-ordinate the programme which is planned for the autistic young person and to work with parents/carers. In a large secondary school it would also be helpful to have one liaison teacher for each subject area
- **Planning and organisation of resources** - for example:
 - less structured times of the school day (e.g. break/lunch) may need a higher level of support or access to alternative lunchtime activities and/or a quiet space to go
 - respite for the autistic young person at times of crisis, so open access to a designated area is essential

- a quiet working and teaching area for when the young person is not able to be integrated into mainstream classes
- a venue for small group social skills training
- a clearly defined personal space for equipment and belongings.
- **Efficient communication** - clear lines of communication and consistency in giving feedback – two-way communication is important in order to:
 - obtain feedback on a range of issues, such as the response to management programmes and curriculum issues, stress triggers etc
 - disseminate information such as modifications to behavioural targets, changes to the timetable, arrangements for cover teachers, details of special events etc. which may cause anxiety.

Efficient communication should also include clear lines of communication between home and school. This is covered on page 37, Working with parents/carers.

A planned response for the curiosity of other pupils – which might be included in personal, health, social and economic (PHSE) education.

The staff team

Planning by the staff team should include:

- clarification of roles and responsibilities among members of the team who work with the autistic young person: there will be a need for non-contact time for team planning
- planning with parents/carers: home/school communication should aim for a mutually supportive approach and understanding
- agreed contingency plans for problems and moments of crisis
- In-service training about methods and strategies which might be useful to manage learning and behaviour
- planning of management strategies to ensure consistency within the team and the efficient dissemination of information to the whole school staff
- the personal, social and pragmatic communication needs of the young person being defined, specifically taught and given high priority.

Planning for the individual young person

This will include:

- transition planning
- the organisation of the classroom
- the organisation of the learning experience
- establishing contingency plans for difficult situations
- ensuring access to the academic curriculum

- identification of personal, social and communication development targets
- working with parents/carers.

Issues related planning for the individual young person are covered in more detail on the following pages.

Monitoring and evaluation

A system of review needs to be established prior to the start of the young person's placement. Initially, it may be necessary to have a brief daily review. Individual targets will need to be very small and may need to be adjusted weekly or fortnightly.

Termly reviews should be held with parents/carers and the young person to check that specific needs have been addressed, to review progress and to set new targets. Reviews should also check that any crisis management arrangements remain appropriate and that communication is working well.

A checklist of things to be done when developing a whole school approach

- **Roles and responsibilities:** clarify these with all school staff - there will be a need for non-contact time for planning
- **Information gathering:** gather information from parents/carers and any professionals involved
- **Planning with parents/carers:** discuss potential difficulties and the ways parents/carers deal with them. Plan home and school communication routes, aiming for mutual support and understanding
- **Organising in-service training:** plan training about teaching methods and management strategies
- **Planning the learning environment:** make any necessary adjustments to room settings and equipment lay out
- **Routines:** plan clear routines for the beginning and end of the day and for other regularly occurring activities. Provide visual structure when needed
- **Contingency plans:** anticipate possible problems and crises, on an ongoing basis. Formulate action plans and communicate these to the people who need to know
- **Ensuring consistency:** plan and share strategies to ensure consistency within the core team and the wider school. Ensure monitoring of the young person and efficient two-way dissemination of information
- **Support network:** ensure support for teachers and classroom assistants who work with the young person
- **Individual education plans:** include programmes to develop skills in the triad of impairments
- **National curriculum:** ensure the young person is gaining full access and that a suitable level of differentiation is offered
- **Individual approaches:** circulate a profile of the young person's strengths and weaknesses to all staff together with strategies to address them. The 'Individual pupil profile' may help with this (see Resource sheet 5 on page 56).

Transition planning

Transition to the new school

The importance of carefully planning the transition to a new school for young people with ASD cannot be over-emphasised. Young people with autism will be particularly vulnerable during transition because of the inevitable change of environment and routine. Even a young person who appears very settled in his or her current environment can have difficulties with changing schools. The new school will need to be provided with full information about the educational and social responses of the young person.

Many young people with ASD will make great efforts to conform and behave appropriately at school and the cost in terms of high levels of anxiety and stress may only be apparent when they get home. Careful planning for transition is very important as a prelude to successful inclusion.

Timeline of action for successful transition

Summer term - four terms before the change of school

For a young person with a statement of special educational needs, it would be appropriate to call an annual review. For other young people it may also be useful to hold a transition planning meeting, involving key people (e.g. the SENCo from both the present and the new school, the educational psychologist, parents/carers, representatives from other relevant agencies). At this point, the new school may not be identified). Nevertheless the meeting can be helpful in assisting parents/carers to consider the options available and the support that that the young person may require.

Autumn term - three terms before transfer

If a transition meeting has not already been held, there should be one at this point.

Potential sources of support for parents/carers in identifying and visiting schools should be identified, for example from the Parent Partnership Service. Parents/carers and young persons should be encouraged to visit identified schools.

Spring term - two terms before

When a new school placement has been confirmed, liaise with parents/carers about their expectations for their child.

A detailed plan of action should be drawn up involving parents/carers, the SENCo from both the present and the new school and representatives of any other relevant agencies/professionals involved.

The **action plan** should include:

- successful strategies to manage learning and behaviour
- organisation of the learning environment
- possible stress factors in the new school environment
- strategies to promote personal, social and educational development.

It may be helpful to identify strategies that have been used previously that the young person no longer relies upon but which could be useful. Some of these may need to be re-introduced to provide initial support in the new school.

Consider staff development needs and any additional resources that may be required.

A programme of visits to the new school should be arranged for the summer term.

Summer term - one term before

The **programme of visits** should include:

- introducing the young person to the new environment and key people
- providing a plan and/or photos of key areas in the school
- practicing navigation around the site
- visiting at different times of day to provide an understanding of daily routines
- a visit from key staff from the present school to the new school, to identify any possible sources of stress in the new environment.

Whole staff awareness raising and/or training should be considered.

A summary report from the SENCo of the present school should be made available to relevant staff in the new school including key points in relation to the young person's strengths, weaknesses, stress triggers and successful management strategies.

Initial planning will need to take into account:

- the first Individual Education Plan (IEP)/programme of work
- school arrangements e.g. planning the physical space
- appropriate systems of support (for example teaching assistant support, break/lunchtime support, use of peer group)
- on-going opportunities for parents/carers to be involved in the process
- the young person's views and feelings about the transition.

Autumn term – first term after change of school

Set up a regular communication system between home and school, which might include:

- home/school book
- email
- regular meetings between key people
- telephone calls.

Set up regular planning and monitoring meetings to include key staff and parents/carers, which may initially need to be weekly. Identify a time at the end of term to more formally review support and progress with staff, parents/carers and representatives from other agencies.

Ensure that the young person has detailed timetable and organisational information appropriate to his or her needs. This may need to be visual.

Establish peer group support, for example through discussion within the tutor group, a circle of friends, a buddy system. The use of an older young person to act as a mentor and the provision of a lunchtime haven may help the young person to feel less vulnerable.

Ensure all staff are informed about the young person's needs and the support that has been put in place.

Respond immediately to any difficulties that arise and develop strategies for dealing with subsequent related difficulties including appropriate future responses. Raised levels of anxiety are often an early warning sign that the young person is experiencing learning or social difficulties.

Review staff training needs.

Spring term second term onwards

Continue to provide support and review progress on a regular basis. Ongoing monitoring will be required throughout the young person's school career as needs will change over time.

Transition to secondary school - questions parents/carers may want to ask

Visiting

- How many times will my child visit the school before she or he starts?
- Can the Yr 6 teaching assistant visit?
- Can 'J' meet his or her key worker before starting at the school?
- Will any member of the support staff visit the primary school and work alongside my child?

Getting to School

- Where does the bus leave from?
- What time is the bus?
- How much is the bus fare? Are there any arrangements in case a young person loses his or her fare?
- What if the bus does not arrive at the end of the day?
- Where does he or she get off?

Geography of the school

- Will my child have an opportunity to practice finding his or her way around the school?
- Is there a map of the school? Is it colour coded?
- Can we take photos?
- Is there a 'chill out' area?
- Is there a buddy system?
- Can arrangements be made if my child finds it hard to move around the corridors at 'busy' times?

Timetable

- Is there colour coding for subjects?
- Are teachers' names written in full?
- How is time represented, e.g. by clock faces?
- Are rooms numbered?
- Is a copy of the timetable available for parents/carers?

Lockers

- Do the young people have lockers? If so,
- Where are the lockers?
- Where is it safe to keep the key?
- Does the office keep a spare key?

School diaries

- Can this be used as a home/school communication tool?
- Will the teaching assistant help with entering homework details?

Break times

- Where do the young people go?
- Is there queuing for lunch?
- What lunchtime clubs are available?
- Where can you get help, for example if lunch money is lost?
- Is there a 'refuge' area?

Social problems

- What is the school's policy on bullying?
- Which member of staff is responsible for bullying?
- Can you email the SENCo?
- Are young people encouraged to join after school activities?

General questions

- How will my child's special educational needs be explained to all the staff who teach him or her?
- Is there an after school homework club?
- What happens if my child is unable to do the homework?
- Is there a system in place for a child to leave lessons when he or she anxious?
- Are parents/carers encouraged to set up a termly meeting with the SENCo to discuss progress in the first year?
- Do PSHE lessons include ASD awareness for young people?

The SEN Service have a booklet 'Checklist for Visiting Schools' which gives advice to parents/carers when visiting a school. Please refer to page 44 for how to obtain a copy of this publication.

The organisation of the classroom

Identifying anxiety triggers

Anxiety triggers can be identified through discussion with parents/carers, last year's teacher or, in the case of transfer to a new school, through liaison with staff at the current school. It is essential to keep the young person's anxiety levels low to enable him or her to learn effectively. Common anxiety triggers may include:

- crowded places such as the cloakroom or corridors. Some young people may find close physical proximity, for example sitting in a group on the carpet or lining up, anxiety provoking. At secondary school, moving around the site at lesson changeover times may be difficult
- crowded places also present opportunities for misunderstandings about the intention behind actions. Many young people are not aware whether something was accidental or done on purpose. They may assume intent and react with aggression or anxiety, including making accusations of bullying. Explaining about accidental as opposed to intentional actions can be helpful
- some young people may experience unusual responses to sensory stimuli, including:
 - noisy environments, for example the dining hall
 - light intensity or flicker
 - tactile sensitivity to some materials or personal clothing.

If these issues are not identified and accommodated, they may cause instances of poor concentration, refusal to co-operate or even tantrums which are difficult to predict.

- some young people may have 'obsessions' about certain environmental features such as pipes and plumbing, water or wooden surfaces. When these are known, it is easy to ensure that they are seated away from such distractions.

Defining personal space

- Many young people with ASD do best in a rather formal classroom setting where there is limited free movement around the room. For some the transition from KS1 to KS2 may, therefore, be a positive experience. At secondary school, it is often easier if the teacher has a seating plan so that there is a set place for the young person
- A classroom where the areas of activity are clearly defined, visually, for example, following a High-Scope model, is helpful for young people with ASD. They know what to expect in advance as they move to each area and this keeps arousal/anxiety levels low
- When flexible arrangements are required, the young person's place can be identified by a mat or a card placed on the desk or table so that he or she does not have to negotiate his or her own seating arrangements with the rest of the group
- Some young people will prefer it if their personal space is 'protected' for example in the corner of the room, or at the back where they are not overlooked by other young people. They will feel safer and, will therefore, be calmer
- In some settings, it may be possible for the young person to have his or her own workspace where he or she can concentrate away from a shared table space. Many young people prefer

a quiet 'office' space for independent working, so this need not interfere with social inclusion, if other young people are given the same opportunities.

- Equipment should be clearly labelled and kept in the same place, which should also be labelled. When things have to be rearranged, it is better to explain this to the young person, re-label the storage places and support the young person if he or she becomes anxious
- Large spaces such as the assembly hall, noisy spaces such as the dining hall or open spaces such as the gymnasium can present particular challenges. Defining in advance where a young person should be in that space, for example a name on a chair, and markers such as a hoop or mat on the floor, will help to reduce anxiety and the challenging behaviour that might otherwise ensure
- It may be helpful to introduce a young person with Asperger's Syndrome to some settings gradually. Consider whether it is something it is essential that he or she does straight away? The lunch queue and the canteen routines may need careful pre-preparation and practice with support before the young person can be expected to cope with them independently. Also the young person may not feel confident to eat in a busy setting at first. Going into the canteen early and sitting at a small table near the door may be appropriate first steps.

The daily routine

Young people with ASD will all benefit from a clearly defined, predictable routine to the school day. Knowing what to expect helps to keep anxieties levels low for all young people not just those with ASD. Visual support for the daily routines could include:

- a visual timetable for the morning/afternoon or the whole day
- visual schedules for particular times of the school day such as the morning routine
- work schedules which define what work is to be done and how much work. The 'finish' should be clearly defined together with any reward for task completion, for example an opportunity to choose an activity until the rest of the group have finished.

Not all young people will require all of these forms of visual support, but some may. Consideration will need to be given to the way that the visual support is presented. In terms of symbolic representation, drawings, then icons and then the written word increasingly abstract and young or developmentally delayed young people may require real pictures of real objects/settings.

Visual systems can help to build flexibility into the routines, for example:

- to help with discussion about any scheduled changes at the start of the day
- an 'oops' card for unexpected changes
- a 'people who will help us today' picture board to deal with staff changes
- preparation for special visits or events. Paradoxically, some young people are able to tolerate big changes such as going on holiday, better than changes to their daily routines.

It is useful to have a pre-prepared briefing note to give to cover teachers so that they are aware of any special arrangements in advance. Not knowing that 'J' always puts his work in the box on the teacher's desk as soon as he has finished – can lead to misunderstandings and potential confrontations.

What will happen in the lesson?

- Some young people may not be able to concentrate on what the teacher says until they are reassured about what will happen in the lesson. This can be one cause of interruptions – asking anxiety questions about “what’s next”
- The class timetable will often show a session such as English that extends for up to 60 minutes. It is often helpful for all young people, but especially those with ASD, to have that time clearly defined in terms of the sequence of activities and the expectations for the session
- At secondary school an individual lesson schedule, placed at the young person’s set place in class or given on entry to the class, may reduce initial anxieties about what is expected
- Some young people may take a long time to get their equipment out and put it away because they have set routines for this. For example, if they are not allowed to line up their pencils they may become anxious and be unable to concentrate on the content of the lesson.

Organisation of the learning experience

Teaching style

The style of teaching is as important as the profile of the young person with ASD in ensuring effective access to the curriculum. Key points to consider are:

- even for a young person with good verbal skills, rapid processing of the language of instruction and explanation may be difficult because of subtle language problems. This is discussed further in Language and Communication on page 24. Visual support and opportunities for experiential learning are important
- a 'lively' motivating teaching style, rich in analogy and tonal variation, may be confusing for a young person with ASD and obscure the key messages. A calm, consistent, style together with a social learning, for example on-line programmes, may be more helpful
- avoidance of non-literal, figurative language which may confuse a young person with ASD
- clear explicit rules, for example when and when not to talk, which are visually reinforced
- it may be hard for the young person to make choices as part of an integrated day or during choosing time. He or she may always go for one of their strongly preferred activities. Start with a clearly defined choice of (a) or (b) and when this is achieved, add in a third choice and so on, working towards freedom of choice.

Attention issues

- Focussing attention in class may be difficult because of the distractions that the classroom environment presents. Young people with ASD often find it hard to 'filter out' distracting stimuli especially those to which they are particularly sensitive. Sensory sensitivities are discussed in detail in 'The organisation of the classroom' on page 14
- Often engaging the young person with the class learning agenda may be a major challenge because he or she may have strong interests and preferences about what he or she wants to do.

Young people with ASD are more likely to engage with a task when:

- tasks are built around their interests, for example maths problems about speed and distance can be related to trains
- problems are set in a familiar, preferred context and make very explicit links from the known to the less familiar
- task completion is linked to something which the young person finds rewarding but which also fits in with the constraints of the classroom. This may not be an obvious choice for other young people, for example, stacking text books, looking at the train timetables. Give the young person a visual reminder (either a word cue or a picture cue) of what they are working for
- tasks are presented in a way which clearly shows how much work is required. This can be made easier with a work sheet. If the class are working from a book and are asked to do only certain questions (e.g. 1, 4, 5, 6) and there are other questions on the page, the young person may become anxious about not doing the others and have difficulties with concentration and/or ask repetitive questions. To avoid this happening, a sheet containing only the questions to be tackled will eliminate any distractions

- there is a clear concept of 'finish'. Some young people with ASD find it very hard to leave a task which they have started at the end of the allotted time. This can lead to problems with transition to a new activity or leaving a lesson on time. Giving the young person a task with a clear finish, which is of the length that experience shows they are likely to be able to complete in the time available, may avoid precipitating challenging behaviour.

Motivation

- It may be difficult to motivate a young person by using the usual social reinforcers and concrete rewards such as time to do a preferred activity when they have 'finished' may be more effective.
- Young people may not see the point of an activity that does not interest them and, therefore, refuse to engage. This may extend to showing working for maths (when they have the answer) or editing their written work
- Computer aided learning is often less stressful than people mediated learning for young people with ASD and, therefore, they learn more efficiently and prefer this approach to learning
- Young people may be reluctant to attempt new tasks and prefer the safe and familiar. This is often because they do not get the main idea, or see the relevance or the possibilities of a new experience. It is important to relate the unfamiliar to the familiar and to make these links explicit
- Making choices may be difficult if the young person is unable to 'see' the potential offered by the options. They may select the safe, predictable, familiar option each time
- Try to build lessons around their interests, e.g. link electricity to trains (though this can be more difficult at secondary level).

Working as a member of a group

As previously explained, young people with ASD may find people mediated learning and working as a member of a group, a distraction from the learning objectives. They may find the skills which are involved in collaboration particularly difficult, including:

- listening to the contribution of others
- consideration of the ideas of others
- stating ideas clearly
- negotiation to resolve problems
- clarification of differences of opinion
- the range of pragmatic skills such as:
 - turn taking
 - timing of interventions
 - avoidance of violations of style
 - proxemics (how close to others it is appropriate to sit or stand)

- sharing of ideas and equipment
- acceptance of constructive criticism and tolerance of the selection of an idea/solution suggested by someone else.

It may be necessary to decide if the purpose of the activity for this young person is a social outcome or a learning outcome.

- A learning outcome may best be accomplished in a non-group working context.
- Social outcomes can be identified for the young person and facilitated in a group-working context. Each of the skills needed for collaboration can be:
 - taught specifically
 - practised in a scripted setting
 - generalised into a facilitated group session.
- The allocation of roles within the group setting may give the young person an opportunity to make a legitimate, valued contribution to the group. For example, meticulous measuring of data, accurate reading aloud of the questions or the report of the activity, careful setting up of the equipment.

This principle may extend to social settings, for example, a young person with Asperger's Syndrome travelling with a snooker team to keep the score.

Generalisation of skills

A limited ability to generalise skills is associated with central cohesion problems (see Central coherence on page 21). Because of this, making connections may be difficult if:

- information is learned in a different lesson/subject
- information is learned in a different room
- information is taught by a different person
- information was learned some time ago in a different context
- small (to others, insignificantly) changes have been made to the task
- a different form of words was used in previous situations.

The links from the 'known' to the 'unknown' will need to be made very explicit for the young person by careful scaffolding of the learning experience. It may be helpful to:

- practice things in every situation as the young person is unlikely to generalise from mathematics to English; room to room, teacher to teacher
- say exactly what is wanted: "I sit on the chair", **not** "don't go there/do that"
- bear in mind 'showing' is usually more effective than 'telling'. It often helps, for example, to actually walk the young person through a new routine.

Pace and timing

Young people with ASD may have only limited awareness of the time constraints on activities. They may either work at their own (slow) pace regardless or complete work very rapidly with a high error count and little regard for extending themes or ideas. They may achieve less than they might do and appear less able than their peers because of the difficulty with accommodating time constraints.

It may be helpful to:

- set the task length to fit the time allowed and the pace of the young person then increase the task demands gradually within the same time allocation
- set a number of sentences or paragraphs, as a work target if you need to encourage a more careful, considered outcome
- break the task into sub-goals, for example, who - give three descriptive sentences about the person; where - give two facts about the place etc
- build in extra time for transitions between activities and lessons but also practice rapid transitions out of the lesson context as a task in it's own right.

Imagination/social understanding

Difficulties in this area are linked to the triad of impairments which are integral to an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (see page 1). The young person may experience problems with:

- sequencing, prediction and cause and effect, which in non-ASD young people are first learned through play
- problem-solving and enquiry, which comes from engaging spontaneously with the environment and which some people on the autistic spectrum may only do in a limited number of contexts corresponding to their areas of specific interest
- salience and getting the main idea. What is important in a social situation or learning task may be very idiosyncratic for young persons on the autistic spectrum.

Strengths and difficulties

The young person's profile of cognitive development may be uneven, with areas of strength often corresponding to areas of strong personal interest. It is not safe to assume that related skills are secure, for example, a young person may have strong decoding skills in reading but be unable to understand the text, i.e. be hyperlexic.

Co-ordination difficulties are sometimes associated with autism which:

- may present problems in PE, craft and self-help skills
- may lead to the slow development of writing skills and an associated avoidance of written tasks
- may mean dressing and undressing for PE is a stress point for the teacher and the young person. The young person may be able physically to put on/take off most clothing but find it hard to work to the teacher's time schedule may mean physical problems with buttons, laces, etc may persist for these young persons and specific teaching/practice may be helpful.

Learning style

Young people on the autistic spectrum may show differences in cognitive style which contribute to an inconsistent response to the curriculum. This may include:

- Uneven cognitive development
- Central coherence
- Executive function.

Uneven cognitive development

- **Hyperlexia** - some young people with ASD are able to decode text very well. They did not have problems with the **form** of language (phonology and grammar) in their early years. However, their understanding of what they read may be much more limited because of difficulties with content (semantics, the meanings of words) and with setting what they read in an appropriate social context.

Factual information that they are interested in, for example a physics text book, may be more meaningful than prose which carries social meaning and relies on feelings and emotions as part of the plot device, for example Romeo and Juliet.

- **Areas of strength** - many young people with ASD will have strengths in particular areas of the curriculum and their interest in these areas should be encouraged and praised. They may have an exceptional factual knowledge of an area of interest and may even challenge a teacher when these topics are discussed. Other areas may be avoided because they have limited relevance to the young person. It is often a delicate decision about how much participation should be demanded, particularly if insistence will provoke challenging behaviour. It is particularly hard to make these decisions when other non-autistic members of the group would be expected to conform. Young people with ASD are different, have different motivations and the usual rewards/sanctions may have to be reframed for them.

Central coherence

The ability to draw together diverse information to construct higher level meaning in context (Uta Frith, 1989)

Most people appear to have a drive to make sense of their world by bringing together relevant information from similar past experiences and using this knowledge to plan how to respond or behave. For example, if we are invited to a social occasion we might think about what we know about the other guests and our experiences of similar gatherings and use the information to decide what to wear or what topics of conversation to avoid. Autistic people seem to find it difficult to put together the big picture but may focus their attention on the details of a situation, a person, a task and not easily make sense of the whole experience.

Central coherence is a cognitive style which everyone shares but some people are characterised by relatively weak central coherence and others by strong central coherence. People with weak central coherence may be particularly good at tasks which involved detailed processing, for example proof reading, writing computer programmes, cataloguing. People with strong central coherence may be quick to get the 'gist' of the main idea but quickly become impatient with the details of task completion. We probably all have a preferred area along this continuum between weak and strong central coherence but most of us can operate outside our 'comfort zone' if a task demands an alternative cognitive style. Individuals at the extreme end towards weak central coherence may have a predisposition to develop autism

under some conditions. The parents/carers, especially the fathers of autistic young people, tend to show superior performance on tasks which require detail-focused processing.

Difficulties with central coherence may become apparent in the classroom when young people with autism:

- have difficulty generalising what they have learned in one subject and seeing its relevance in another setting
- fixate on one aspect of a task and do not appear to work towards the same goal as the others in the group
- prefer to continue with known, familiar activities and do not see the relevance or potential in new methods, materials or ideas
- appear to miss the point of a task or the main idea as perceived by the rest of the group
- find it hard to prioritise or organise themselves when working towards a goal which involves several targets
- may experience cognitive overload, because information is processed a bit at a time
- study skills involve summarising and getting the main idea;
- insistent on routine or sameness because this is predictable and no inference about what might come next is required
- insistent on completing the whole routine or task because it is not complete until all the constituent parts are there
- have specific interests and an intense knowledge of detail - they attend to detail rather than the 'big picture'.

Executive function

Barkley (1995) was influential in introducing the idea of Executive Function as a mechanism for the self-regulation of behaviour. Small children and people with limited executive function show reactive responses to situations for example see a puddle - jump in it, or lose the ball - run into the road to get it.

As we develop we learn to regulate our responses. We learn to:

- inhibit a first impulsive response
- bring our actions and responses under conscious control
- plan our actions
- modify our behaviour according to events and past experiences
- link our behaviour to distant outcomes.

Young people with ASD appear to find it hard to learn self-regulation. Thus, their emotional response may go straight into action without the modifying cognitive processes being engaged. The development of self-regulation is mediated by language and performance on Theory of Mind tests also requires the ability to inhibit immediate personal beliefs.

Self-regulation and the development of Theory of Mind have the same developmental timetable for most young people and both functions have been located in the frontal lobes of the brain. It is interesting that Barkley first studied executive functioning in the context of ADHD for which condition this is a core deficit. It may also help to account for why so many young people with ASD seem to acquire an ADHD label.

Language and communication

Misleading verbal skills

Able young people with autism usually speak clearly and fluently, using a range of grammatical structures. This superficial competence may mask significant comprehension problems. Thus, they may be able to repeat your instructions but not understand how to begin to carry them out. There may be particular problems with aspects of language which change according to the context, for example family terms, pronouns, prepositions. Their use of language may sound pedantic, over-formal and over-precise, in informal settings, so that they stand out as different from their peers.

During conversation, what is said is only part of the message. The listener also relies on non-verbal communication cues, a shared understanding of the context and some understanding or monitoring of the knowledge base of the partner in the conversation. Young people with autism are not easily able to access these supplementary cues.

Listening as a member of a group

Listening to group instructions may be a problem because the young person does not realise that he or she is part of the group. It may be helpful to:

- repeat the instructions for the individual or a small group
- use an agreed signal to engage attention and alert the young person that the message is meant for him or her
- check memory and understanding of the message (instruction, explanation or other verbal input)
- use written/visual cue instructions as reinforcement because they do not disappear like a verbal message.

However whilst some young people may ignore messages for the whole group unless they are prompted that they should listen too, conversely, some young persons may think every message from the teacher is directed at them and burst into tears when another young person is being ‘told off’.

Inference and generalisation

Most young people will use a range of knowledge and experiences to make sense of new information. Young people with ASD have problems with such inference and generalisation so that there is a need to make the connections explicit.

Literal interpretations

Young people with ASD tend to focus on the meaning of the words rather than the intention of the speaker. Hence, there can be literal interpretation of, and the potential confusion which arise from:

- idioms – “pull your socks up”
- figurative language – “It’s raining cats and dogs”
- proverbs – “it never rains but it pours”

- sarcasm – “Were you born in a barn or something?”
- puns and word plays
- rhetorical questions (a politely worded instruction!) – “J, would you like to get out your Maths books now?”
- words with different meanings, e.g. model (catwalk, Lego); flat (home, position)
- similes, metaphors – the use of metaphors to explain new concepts is likely to ‘backfire’.

Shared meaning

There is often a limited understanding of shared meaning, so that the listener may be puzzled by conversation gambits which come “out of the blue” or be bored by long tedious explanations which relate to a strong area of interest, often a computer theme for the present cohort.

Pragmatics

Pragmatic problems may result in difficulties with:

- timing of contributions, for example interrupting when the teacher is talking, calling out in class
- turn-taking in conversation, an important social group skill
- chaining of a conversation – keeping to the topic, theme, main idea under discussion without getting side-tracked into an area of interest
- topic closure – knowing when they have said enough to answer a question – and topic change
- adaptation of content, tone etc to the needs of the listener
- modelling of conversation on a didactic teacher style so that it sounds stilted and over-formal in other settings.

Prosody

Speech may be delivered in a flat, monotonous style and it may be difficult for the young person to use intonation as a marker in his or her speech or to understand how others use intonation to signal meaning. Modulation of speed of talking and volume may also present problems.

Intrusive or inappropriate talk

This can become more difficult to manage within the formal situation of a classroom and it is important that the young person is taught when not to interrupt by providing explicit rules. This should help with strategies to control inappropriate interruptions while encouraging appropriate contributions. The responses tend to be idiosyncratic so what works with one young person may not necessarily work for another. A range of options might be:

- ignoring inappropriate talk and reinforcing appropriate responses
- verbal reminders or visual cueing not to interrupt or to draw attention to ‘thinking aloud’. (They really may not be aware that they are giving a verbal commentary about what they are doing)
- the young person or the LSA recording thoughts on paper – a diary approach – rather than interrupting the teacher to share them
- picking up on tangential ideas at a more appropriate time – but the teacher writing the idea down, for example on the white board so the young person is reassured
- rewarding non-interruption.

Repetitive questioning

Repetitive questioning is unlikely to involve ‘sincere’ questions because of Theory of Mind issues. Repetitive questions are usually such as ‘What are we doing next?’ and provoked by anxiety or uncertainty. Alternative possibilities have:

- a search for consistency and predictability (Do I get the same answer each time?)
- modelling from teachers who ask display questions rather than genuine questions, for example the teacher points to a Bunsen burner and says, “What is this?”, when the teacher (we hope) knows the answer
- anxiety and need for reassurance – an increase in the incidence of obsessional questioning usually signals a rise in anxiety levels. Find the cause to stop the behaviour.

Understanding rules

The literal explanation of language and the tendency to apply rules in a rigid inflexible way may make social relationships with peers difficult, especially if it leads to ‘telling tales’. The judgement of whether a rule can be ‘bent’ is a sophisticated one. The meaning behind and purpose of a rule may not inform the young person with ASD about the relative importance of keeping the rule, for example:

- not running out into the street
- not eating your snack before break.

Social aspects of learning

One of the core difficulties for young people with ASD is understanding what other people think and believe. They have difficulties with what is known as theory of mind. This affects their social interaction so that they may find being with other people confusing and anxiety provoking.

Social Understanding and Theory of Mind (ToM)

Able young people with ASD in a mainstream school are usually eager to communicate but may be unskilled in the art of communication. The skills of social interaction and social communication are automatic and implicit for most young people but may need to be specifically and explicitly taught to those with ASD.

Babies whose social interaction is developing normally:

- at 10 weeks show different body movement patterns according to the social expressions of carers
- at 5-7 months respond selectively to an angry/friendly face which shows that they have attached meaning to the facial expressions of their carers.

These babies have developed a Theory of Mind: they understand that another person has thoughts/knowledge/feelings which are different from their own and that they can look to other people for cues about what is safe/not safe or how to behave in a given situation. This is a useful life skill and neurotypical babies will respond to new experiences by taking a cue from the carer by seven months.

Autistic young people do not appear to develop a Theory of Mind in the same way. The general consensus is that there are many uncertainties about the age that a young person with ASD can be identified with any degree of certainty. The issue is currently being researched from many perspectives.

Theory of Mind enables us to interpret the behaviour of other people by picking up cues about their possible internal mental states their thoughts, beliefs, desires and emotions. It is also about understanding that others have their own plans, thoughts and points of view. Without a Theory of Mind it is hard to:

- predict the behaviour of other people so that their actions cannot be anticipated or predicted. This makes social interactions anxiety provoking and fuels the need for predictability, safe routines and no changes
- make a connection between your behaviour and the reactions of others
- predict the reactions of others and see connections between your own actions and the reactions of others. Because of this people with ASD are not able to deliberately 'wind up' or manipulate people. They may repeat actions for which they get a strong response that is predictable but more in a 'stimulus-response' model of responding
- show empathy to other people when you can't understand or predict what they are thinking or feeling
- understand what others know or do not know so that young people with ASD will often assume prior knowledge, for example that we will know who 'he' was

- understand that there are some questions to which we do not know the answer or what is 'right'; it may be a matter of personal opinion.

Theory of Mind difficulties appear to be unique to those with ASD as other groups of young people who are at the same developmental level in other areas do not struggle with this.

Difficulties with Theory of Mind make young people with ASD particularly vulnerable to:

- flattery
- deliberate deceptions – they tend to take behaviour at face value
- persuasion – being set up to do inappropriate things
- knowing whether an action was deliberate or an accident
- understanding and responding to teasing.

Social interaction

Some young people with ASD may show little interest in social interactions. Even some high functioning young people with ASD may be academically successful but will seldom choose to interact with their peers. Difficulties may arise if they are 'wound-up' by other young people but otherwise they may appear quite content with a minimal social experience. However, most young people with ASD in mainstream schools are those with Asperger's Syndrome who are often eager to interact and communicate but are at risk of alienating others because of their difficulties with the skills that are needed for doing so successfully. They are often very aware that they do not have friends and are ignored or avoided by their classmates. Their attempts to interact and play with others may lead to misunderstandings and confrontations which can be very distressing and exacerbate their existing levels of anxiety.

In many cases it will be necessary to teach the skills for successful social interaction quite explicitly. However, the impact of using an 'off-the-shelf' generic social skills programme may be minimal in terms of changing behaviour. What is often required is a clear identification of the difficult areas for that particular young person and to advise a targeted programme with built-in opportunities for generalisation. Every young person will be different but some common key areas that may need to be addressed include:

- reading and signalling facial expression and linking this to work on emotions
- reading and signalling body language including:
 - signs of good listening
 - social distance rules (proxemics).
- the pragmatic aspects of language to facilitate conversational exchanges
- the skills that are required for working successfully as a member of a group
- the behaviour that is expected to make, and keep friends which would usually be supported by systems such as Circle of Friends, the use of mentors etc
- the development of social play skills, which may include imaginative play, the rules and conventions of games as well as the ability to respond appropriately to turn taking, losing etc.

Difficulties with social interaction and play often make break and lunchtimes the most challenging part of the school day. Young people with ASD may need more support, supervision and guidance at these times than they do in the classroom.

Accidents and incidents frequently happen during free play and a young person with ASD may not be able to anticipate dangers or be aware of dangers to the same degree as their peers. Also, difficulties with executive control may make it harder for them to realise when a situation is getting out of hand and it is time to stop or calm things down.

As social interaction, social communication, social understanding form the triad of impairments which is unique to ASD, intervention in this area is a priority for the young person. While young people are helped to develop the skills that they need, it may be appropriate to provide a sanctuary where they may temporarily withdraw from the demands of social interaction.

The Personal, Social Curriculum

The understanding of social interaction and social communication are automatic and implicit for most young people but may have to be specifically and explicitly taught to a young person with ASD. The personal, social curriculum is a high priority for most young people with ASD and this may necessitate limiting access to the full range of curriculum subjects, in order to accommodate individualised and small group teaching.

There is some doubt whether learning about certain aspects of subjects such as history, geography or a modern foreign language is really a curricular priority for a young person whose bizarre behaviour and lack of social understanding is far more likely to lead to problems in adjustment to life later on, than will any lack of academic qualifications (Jordan and Powell, 1995)

Social understanding is simply our way of understanding people and making sense of social behaviour and communication in our every day lives. The personal, social curriculum should address the development of social understanding for the individual young person and may include a range of aspects, for example:

- behaviour which is appropriate to the context
- relationships and the concept of friendship
- self-awareness and self-reflection
- labelling and recognising emotions in self and others
- developing a Theory of Mind (understanding that other people have different thoughts and feelings)
- mechanisms for coping with socially challenging situations, for example playtimes
- management of anxiety, for example at transition points.

Social and pragmatic communication skills may need to be given particular high priority. Teaching may include:

- appropriate initiation of communication
- awareness of the information a listener needs in order to understand conversation
- maintaining a topic of conversation without veering off at a tangent

- increasing awareness of the interactional nature of communication, i.e. the young person's role as a listener and of his or her listener's needs
- turn-taking – knowing when it is his or her turn to speak or not
- how to end a conversation
- 'reading' and 'providing' non-verbal cues, i.e. interpretation of facial expressions, use of eye contact, change of tone and loudness of voice, gesture, inferences about feelings, proximity to others
- knowing when it is appropriate to talk or be quiet
- extending understanding of the non-literal interpretation of language
- adjusting what is said and how it is said to different people, in different contexts.

It is important to ensure that it is the understanding of social situations that is developed not the rote learning of skills.

Emotional aspects of learning

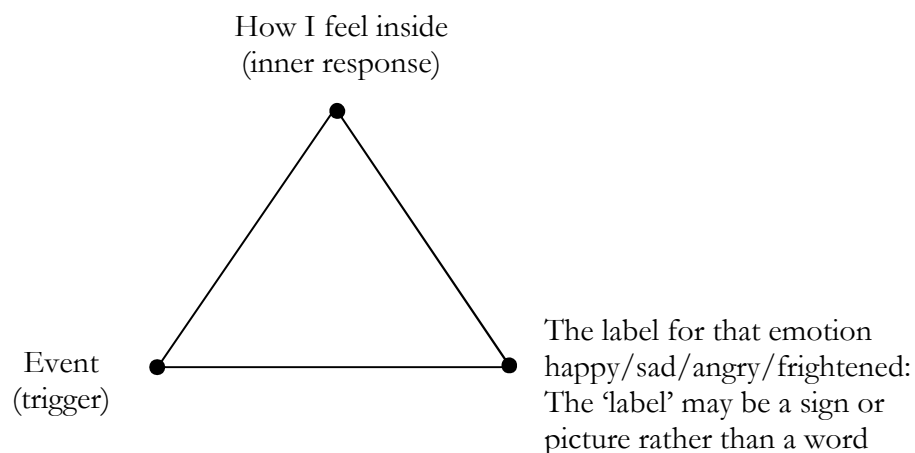
Young people with ASD often experience very strong emotions that they find harder to self-regulate than do neurotypical peers. They may also react to the strong emotional states of other people without being able to process, recognise, label or interpret the context of those emotions in themselves or in other people.

Emotional and behavioural development

By the age of 3 years, children who are developing normally are able to:

- use words to identify a range of emotions
- identify the triggers for these emotions
- talk about past and future emotions
- relate actions to the emotional states that trigger them
- talk about the possible consequences of actions.

Young people with ASD may not be able to achieve any of these targets without support. The first step is to explore whether they are able to make the links for themselves between:



Until young people understand their own emotions they will not be able to interpret or understand the emotions of others. The first steps to Emotional Literacy Programme provides a framework for developing these early emotional awareness skills. Understanding our own emotions is the first step towards being able to regulate the responses to these emotions. Young people with ASD often appear overwhelmed by high states of emotional arousal that can precipitate what we experience as challenging behaviour.

The purpose of behaviour for all of us is to get our needs met and it is always helpful, for any young person, to try to analyse the communicative intent of their behaviour. The obsessions, tantrums and challenging behaviour exhibited by young people with ASD are often precipitated by high states of arousal due to anxieties. It may be helpful to think in terms of:

- is the environment the problem?
 - are any triggers present, for example noise or crowds
 - is there sensory overload, and can distractions be reduced
 - has there been a change or transition which was not pre-prepared.
- do they understand?
 - can you reduce the verbal load
 - provide visual support
 - provide clear routines.
- are they anxious about the task?
 - can you adapt the level of challenge
 - can you provide work systems to give structure.
- are you the problem? (Be honest with yourself)
 - how did you react
 - it is important to remain calm and avoid an emotional response. The broken record technique may help
 - have you been aware of and sensitive to their needs?
 - have you read the cues of anxiety levels rising early enough?

The behaviours can effectively be analysed using standard ABCC charts or STAR charts (Zarkowska & Clements, 1994)

Some strategies and hints that might be helpful for routine intervention would include:

- young people will need to be matched with sensitive support staff who have good listening skills and with whom they feel comfortable
- carefully monitoring and changing partnerships that are not working
- as with all young persons, avoiding open confrontation: the desire to please figures of authority may not be well established and young people with autism may persist in their demands
- young people with autism need to be very clear about school rules and to be told that they apply to everyone: like all young people, they may be resentful if they are unfairly accused of breaking rules and are usually quick to notice when someone else breaks the rules
- they may not be able to explain what is wrong/what has happened and get frustrated: this may be shown as anger/challenging behaviour. A technique called Comic Strip Conversations can help with this

- there may be problems arising from difficulties in assessing the effect of their actions on others, for example refusing to do anything that does not interest them, saying exactly what they think, insisting on doing something their own way. Such problems can be dealt with by establishing a rule, by being told the subject is closed, by giving clear boundaries or by giving a time limit, for example you can talk about your favourite topic for five minutes a day. A visual picture or written form of the rule that is presented without verbal comment can avoid you being drawn into a verbal exchange
- young people with ASD may be dependent on rules for many situations and may apply these rigidly. Hence particular care needs to be taken when establishing rules with them. They may not understand the meaning behind a rule and that some rules are regularly 'bent' for example not eating a snack in the classroom, while others are absolute for example not leaving the school premises. The inability to prioritise rules sometimes gives rise to tale-telling which can be resented by other young people
- the usual rewards and sanctions may have little meaning: it is often better to reward with privileges which they value and withdraw these as a sanction
- Regarding anxiety, obsessions and tantrums:
 - view these as the means by which the young person is communicating that he or she has a problem
 - use this information to help anticipate and avoid future problems
 - reassure the young person and allow him or her time and space to calm down
 - agree strategies for coping with similar situations with the young person, peers and staff
 - teach the young person better strategies
 - make adaptations to remove or diminish any stress triggers
 - try to recognise when levels of arousal are escalating and allow time and/or space to calm down
 - agree a common way of dealing with particular situations which is followed consistently by all staff.

Crisis management and managing difficult behaviour

Young people with ASD usually lack the social sophistication and understanding that would enable them to manipulate others. Although the young person may appear to be attention seeking or manipulative, it is more likely that in 'behaving badly' they are unaware or indifferent to the rules, confused, frustrated, overwhelmed, anxious or a combination of these factors. Below are some examples of situations which may be difficult to manage and when crisis management may be necessary. In all of the examples, a knowledge and understanding of ASD is essential in order to manage the situation effectively.

Refusal to work

Strategies to try if a young person refuses to start a given activity:

- check that:
 - the young person knows what has to be done and what the beginning/end of the task is

- instructions are literal and concise
- whether the task can be broken down into smaller stages (first, next, last)
- the young person has all the equipment necessary
- there are no particularly distracting environmental factors.
- reinforce verbal instructions with visual/concrete cues
- introduce a 'reward' for completing the task, for example an enjoyable/relaxing activity
- model the required behaviour/responses
- ensure the young person is not overwhelmed by the attention of adults - give space and time to begin the task independently
- be prepared to negotiate - give time to calm down, try re-directing but be prepared to compromise through offering choices, for example if they would be prepared to write in a different coloured pen.

Calling out and making inappropriate noises and remarks

A lack of awareness of the social inappropriateness of calling out may be disruptive to a lesson. Useful strategies may include:

- a reminder of the rules, for example no talking in assembly and a clear explanation that their behaviour is inappropriate
- use of non-verbal cues to indicate the need to be quiet, for example a hand held up to indicate 'stop' when a comment is made
- ensuring the young person knows when he or she can contribute and providing structured opportunities for verbal contribution
- adults responding calmly but firmly.

Obsessional behaviour which disrupts the class

Use strategies to support the young person to be more secure in what is to them a confusing situation:

- structure the situation – use the interest or obsession as a reward and timetable it on the lesson plan
- try to encourage new, more appropriate interests rather than extinguishing old ones
- use the obsession in a positive way where possible, for example identifying links with the curriculum.

Temper tantrums

Angry outbursts in the classroom may be due to a lack of ability to communicate or a high level of anxiety. Useful strategies may include:

- not encroaching on the young person's personal space if possible and ensure other young people do not do so

- speaking calmly and clearly, giving a clear message as to what behaviour is expected, along with reassurance and visual cues
- having a clear procedure as to what will happen if the young person becomes distressed which the young person, other young people and adults are aware of
- being aware of what triggers any outbursts and taking preventative action to avoid the triggers. Be aware of the things which calm the young person down which are likely to be highly individual. Parents/carers can often help with the identification of both triggers and calming strategies
- using visual cues which are non-personal and, therefore, less likely to provoke a challenge.

Social isolation, rejecting others, or won't let others near

A young person may become agitated when others encroach on his or her personal space and may find it difficult to cope with the unpredictable nature and language demands of a social situation, for example chatting in the corridor. Useful strategies may include:

- start by introducing social interaction in a structured and predictable way, for example inviting others into a designated space, structured game etc. Gradually increased the number in the group.
- provide a sanctuary on occasions for temporary withdrawal
- introducing meetings of large groups of people, for example assemblies, last of all. Start when the hall is empty and introduce a few more people at a time
- ensure the peer group are aware of any difficulties and encourage them not to put pressure on the young person to socialise
- teach specific social skills (using Socially Speaking, Circle Time, etc) and an individually planned social skills development programme.

Anxiety, depression and fear of everyday things

An exaggerated reaction to everyday objects and things is common among young persons with Asperger's Syndrome. This may be manifest in either hypersensitivity or a lack of reaction. Useful strategies may include:

- trying to identify what is making the young person afraid or anxious. This may be something that other people would not even notice, for example the room has been repainted or an item of furniture moved
- reduce/remove unpleasant stimuli
- plan a desensitisation programme to increase tolerance in a gradual, phased way
- ensure that the peer group is positive and supportive in their responses
- use social stories – see the list of resources/references in Appendix 4 on page 45
- ensure that parents/carers are aware as a joint approach may help to understand the triggers and identify possible solutions.

Running out of class

Running out of class may be an avoidance tactic for difficult situations. Useful strategies may include:

- identify the triggers and, when possible, eliminate the problem
- ensure a sufficiently secure physical environment
- ensure that the young person has his or her own protected personal space in the class
- use of an exit card, identified area for retreat and time limit for return.

Transport arrangements unexpectedly change

Changes of routine such as a bus not arriving can be anxiety provoking. Useful strategies may include:

- familiarising the young person with travel routines, for example practice the route to school
- identifying an agreed place to go if the bus does not arrive, for example school office
- identifying key peers/adults who could help.

Transition difficulties throughout the day

A young person may become agitated when it is time to transition from one lesson to another and may use delaying tactics such as going to the toilet or asking for a drink of water. Useful strategies may include:

- ensure all staff are aware of the transitioning difficulties, for example that the young person might arrive late for a lesson
- keep things as calm as possible and avoid confrontation
- be prepared to allow extra time
- support from an LSA to move round school at busy times
- the option to leave lessons a bit earlier to avoid congested corridors.

Working with parents/carers

Research suggests that having a young person with ASD in the family is different to, and can be more stressful than, having a young person with other disabilities. Reasons for this include:

- the particular difficulties associated with ASD (making relationships, communicating with others and lack of empathy) are the very skills fundamental to family life (Nally, 2000)
- young people with ASD do not respond to the normal social and emotional cues that parents/carers may have used successfully with their other children which can leave them feeling rejected and inadequate as they need to learn how to respond to their child (Jordan, 2002)
- the disruptive nature of the behaviours of some young people with ASD, coupled with their 'normal' physical appearance and the lack of public understanding about the condition, can lead to parents/carers becoming socially isolated (Randall and Parker, 1999).

It is extremely important that there is good communication between school and parents/carers. Parental involvement is mutually beneficial as the exchange of information about how a young person communicates and behaves promotes a better understanding about what may happen in different settings. School staff can learn from parents/carers about their experiences of living with their young person. Parents/carers can learn about strategies used in the education of their child. This can help to promote the consistent approach that is required to address the difficulties with generalisation of learning that is typical for people with ASD.

It will help parents/carers to support the school and their child if they are given information about such things as:

- names of key people
- names of peer and friendship groups
- weekly timetable
- arrangements for homework
- IEPs
- plans for unstructured times such as playtimes
- school events, for example visits, sports day etc
- changes in routine, for example staff changes.

Parents/carers will have the best knowledge of:

- how their child communicates and how best to communicate with him or her
- activities that the young person enjoys
- meaningful rewards and motivators
- any trigger for anxiety or any special fears
- how to calm the young person when he or she is upset.

It is important for young people with ASD to be prepared for any known changes in routine as this can cause anxiety that may lead to challenging behaviour. This is especially true at times of transition such as moving to a new class or a new school. Parents/carers can be involved in this preparation.

Liaison with parents/carers should be ongoing. It is important to ensure that positive feedback is given and that you do not contact them only when difficulties occur. Communication systems should be set up between home and school to share information and to celebrate achievements as well as raise any concerns. Communication systems may include:

- use of a home/school book
- staff being available to talk informally at the beginning and/or end of the school day
- regular meetings between key adults and parents/carers – the place, frequency and time of the meetings to be negotiated with parents/carers
- telephone calls
- email contact.

Any person working with parents/carers of a young person with ASD must also take into account the role of genetic factors (see The aetiology of autism on page 3). There is a substantially increased risk of ASD in siblings of autistic people and there may be a family history of ASD or other developmental disorders amongst the relatives. This genetic link could mean that some parents/carers may share difficulties with social communication and school staff should be aware of and sensitive to this (Jordan, 2002).

It is acknowledged that some young persons with ASD can behave very differently at home from the way they are at school. They may contain any anxieties and difficulties experienced at school and release these when they get home. Less commonly this situation is reversed. Parents/carers and staff need to work together to try to identify the reasons for this and possible solutions.

All school staff should bear in mind the pressures that parents/carers and families may be under due to a young person's needs and avoid making judgements about the support parents/carers are able to provide. Successful working with parents/carers will only take place where there is a willingness to overcome any barriers that school presents to a young person's successful inclusion.

Finally, parents/carers should be offered information about further sources of support, (see Appendix 3) including:

- the Parent Partnership Service
- local parent/carer support groups
- the National Autistic Society
- the Hampshire Autistic Society.

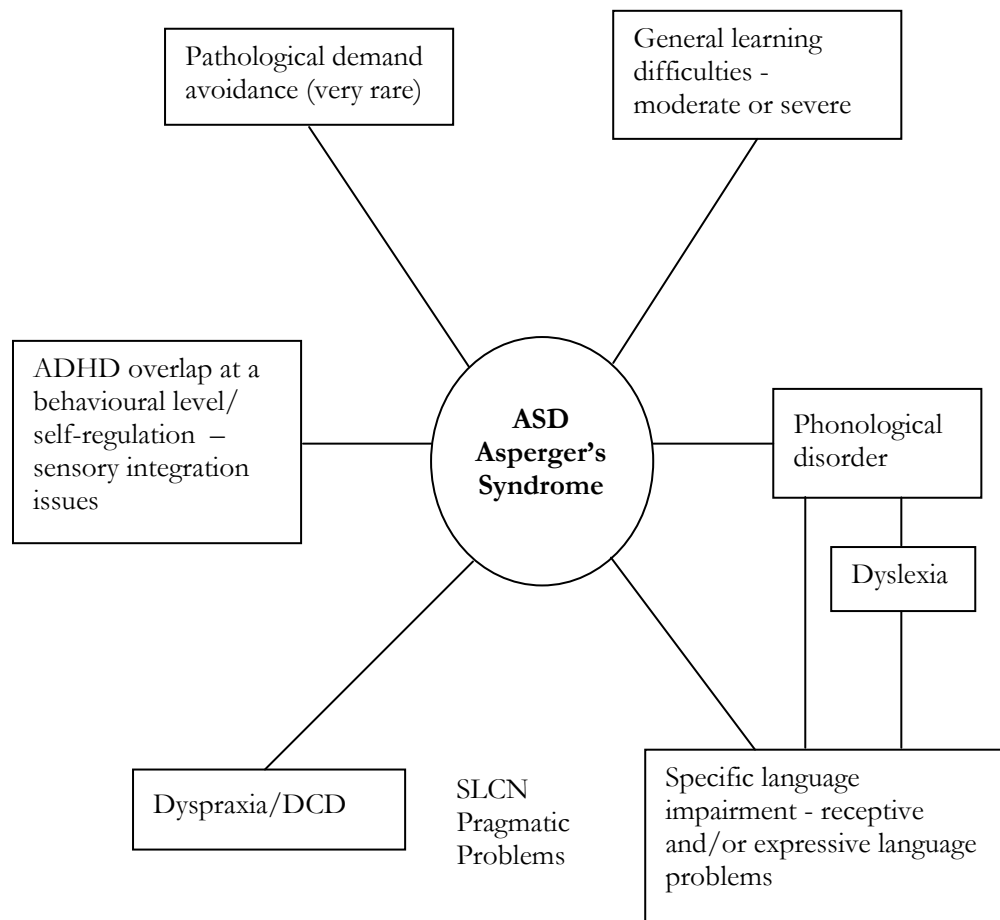
Note: the term 'parent' is used to denote any person who has parental responsibility or is a main carer of the young person.

The family of autistic spectrum disorders

ASD is one of several neuro-developmental disorders which may show overlapping behavioural markers. It may, therefore, be difficult to establish the boundaries between the disorders and there is inevitably some overlap of associated behaviours. Thus:

- young people with ASD and receptive language disorder may have difficulties with the pragmatic (social) aspects of communication
- young people with ASD often find it hard to self-regulate as do those with ADHD or Attachment Disorders.

The diagram below shows some of the range of neuro-developmental disorders that may or may not be associated with ASD.



Pathological demand avoidance syndrome

Pathological demand avoidance syndrome (PDA) is a low incidence condition that is one of the members of the broad family of disorders which are part of the autistic spectrum. Young people with a diagnosis of PDA have a primary diagnosis of ASD but present with key differences. Their early development shows an unusual degree of passivity but later they resist demands obsessively even when asked to do things that they enjoy. Mood swings are quite extreme. These young people present as sociable but may use their verbal skills and competent pragmatic skills to control and manipulate others.

Context for learning

A mainstream school is usually most appropriate because these young people imitate the behaviour of others so that positive role models are important. Strengths in the areas of role play and drama can be used to support their social understanding. In contrast to most young people on the autistic spectrum, they respond positively to novelty and change which serve to stimulate their motivation and interest. These young people respond best when adults set clear non-negotiable boundaries but offer maximum flexibility and choice within those boundaries.

Support for their learning style

Academic demands are often met with avoidance because of a fear of failure and social exposure. It is helpful if a key adult can build up trust and their knowledge of the young person so that they can differentiate work and pace learning challenges appropriately. However, the demand level that can be tolerated may vary from day to day or during a day. Group work may be easier for the young person because it serves to minimise individual pressure.

Teaching style

Young people with PDA often respond to humour within the context of calm acceptance by the adults. Strategies that can be effective include:

- making indirect demands, for example I wonder what is the best way to do 'x', I can't quite see how to do it
- using intuition – what looks as if it might work
- remembering strategies that do not work the first time may be accepted the next time
- using humour, coaxing, cajoling and challenging humorously, for example “I bet you can't”
- varying pace and modifying targets according to the pupil's level of arousal
- differentiating challenges – maximising experiences of success
- trying to end each session with success
- allowing choices, for example in the order of activities and how to complete a task. Tip: offer two alternatives with the one you want being the easier one
- avoiding negatives, i.e. if you say what not to do they may choose it through negativism

- ignoring negative behaviour when possible and not getting drawn into negotiations
- working alongside or behind the young person, making less eye contact than usual as this can appear less confrontational to the young person.

Management of behaviour

The principles for managing behaviour are to avoid confrontation whenever possible by giving options and choices and putting in place pro-active measures. The aim of all the strategies is to teach the young person that co-operation is a safe option. Useful pro-active strategies include:

- using visual systems to de-personalise demands
- using visual systems to avoid being drawn into protracted negotiations
- using complex language which will sound less confrontational than a direct request
- treating each day as a fresh start: their tolerance level varies
- understanding that traditional behavioural methods are not appropriate: a personal relationship-based approach is more effective.

Even when pro-active measures are in place a young person with PDA may resist demands by physical aggression, screaming or swearing. The communicative intent of this behaviour needs to be interpreted as a reaction to feeling anxious and vulnerable: rather like a panic attack. It is important for the adult to remain calm, remove the pressure, and reassure the young person.

Relationships with peers

Young people with PDA usually have a strong desire to make friends but their need to be in control, which may include acting as a rule enforcer, can alienate their peers. When things go wrong, they may remember real or imagined slights, hold grudges and plan retribution. Individual work using social scenarios based on their own experience, for example was 'x' an accident or done on purpose, together with the 'Bin it' technique may help. These young people are vulnerable to teasing and being 'set up' by their peers. Some strategies that have been shown to be effective include:

- Circle of Friends
- anxiety management techniques - including sensory strategies such as massage
- self-awareness work
- adopting a role and behaving according to the role: rehearse different roles for different situations
- using puppets as a third person to defuse confrontation in 1:1 work
- reinforcing learning by letting the young person take the role as 'teacher'
- Cartoon Strip Conversations: a way to provide an 'intellectual' de-personalised response to debriefing after incidents
- video analysis of (good model) social behaviours
- a space for quiet retreat when arousal levels are high.

Young people with PDA respond to a different approach to the management of their learning and behaviour from other young people on the autistic spectrum. A flexible approach is particularly important and strategies that work one day may not be successful on another occasion. The flexible use of a whole tool kit of strategies often needs to be implemented by adults who can remain calm in their response and avoid being drawn into verbal sparring.

Support and training available within Hampshire

Training for those working with school age children

- Autism: Making a Difference (AMAD) - one core day of training with a follow-up workshop day
- Training Autism: Primary (TAPs) - a four day course for primary school staff
- Training Autism Secondary (TA's) - a four day course for secondary school staff.
- PAATHs - an eight day course including a three day workshop at Easter which provide a more in depth training based on TEACCH Principles - one day course for secondary school staff with interest group support twice termly.

Training for those working with pre-school/ foundation stage children

- THOMAS Training A: 'PAATHS' - type course for those working with younger children
- EarlyBird
- TOP A: The THOMAS Outreach Programme home visiting and pre-school setting support for young children with ASD.

Interest Groups

- Autism Good Practice Group (GAP) - this meets twice termly with opportunities to share practice/invited speakers
- Secondary interest group in north east area

Many special schools provide outreach support for schools with young people with ASD and will offer training as part of that.

The Specialist Teacher Advisory Service Communication and Language (CaL) team offer support for young people with ASD in mainstream secondary schools. Website: www.hants.gov.uk/childrens-services/specialneeds/teacher-advisers.

Local parent support groups

There are a number of local National Autistic Society (NAS) branches in Hampshire. Details of these can be accessed via their website (details below).

NAS also produce many useful publications which can also be accessed through the website.

National Autistic Society (NAS)

For information about autism spectrum disorders, services, welfare rights, legislation and support groups

Helpline: 0845 070 4004

Website: www.nas.org.uk

Hampshire Autistic Society

1634 Parkway

Solent Business Park

Whiteley

Fareham

PO15 7OH

Tel: 01489 880881

Website: www.has.org.uk – which also provides details of parent/carer support groups in Hampshire

Email: info@has.org.uk

Contacts

For information and advice on special educational needs

Parent Partnership Service

Hampshire County Council

Children's Services Department

Elizabeth II Court East

The Castle, Winchester SO23 8UG

Tel: 01962 845870

Website: www.hants.gov.uk/parentpartnership

Email: enquiries.pps@hants.gov.uk

For SEN publications

SEN Service

Hampshire County Council

Children's Services Department

Elizabeth II Court East

The Castle, Winchester SO23 8UG

Tel: 0845 603 5620

Website: www.hants.gov.uk/sen-parentpublications

Email: childrens.services@hants.gov.uk

Resources

Useful books

Access to Communication: Developing the Basics of Communication with People with Severe Learning Difficulties through Intensive Interaction, Dave Hewett and Melanie Nind. ISBN 1843121840

Accessing the Curriculum for Pupils with Spectrum Disorders: Using the TEACCH Programme to Help Inclusion, Gary B Mesibov and Marie Howley. ISBN 1853467952

Autism (Developmental Clinical Psychology and Psychiatry), Laura Schreibman. ISBN 0803928106

Autism and Learning: A Guide to Good Practice, Stuart Powell and Rita Jordan. ISBN 185346421X

Autism and Play, Jannik Beyer and Lone Gammeltoft. ISBN 1853028452

Autism The Facts, Simon Baron-Cohen and Patrick Bolton. ISBN 0192623273

Autism: An Inside-Out Approach: An Innovative Look at the Mechanics of Autism and Its Developmental Cousins, Donna Williams. ISBN 1853023876

Autism: Preparing for Adulthood, Patricia Howlin. ISBN 0415115329

Children with Autism: A Developmental Perspective, Marian Sigman and Lisa Capps. ISBN 0674053133

Children with Autism: Diagnosis and Interventions to Meet Their Needs, Colwyn Trevarthen et al. ISBN 1853025550

Communication Before Speech: Development and Assessment, Judith Coupe O'Kane and Juliet Goldbart. ISBN 1853464867

Communication Curriculum and Classroom Practice, Clare Latham and Ann Miles. ISBN 1853467324

Developing Play and Drama in Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders - Dave Sherratt and Melanie Peter. ISBN 1853466972

Do-Watch-Listen-Say: Social and Communication Intervention for Children with Autism, Kathleen Ann Quill. ISBN 1557664536

Learning and Cognition in Autism, Eric Schopler and Gary B Mesibov. ISBN 0306448718

Let Me Hear Your Voice: Family's Triumph Over Autism, Catherine Maurice. ISBN 0709063466

Literacy Through Symbols: Improving Access for Children and Adults, Tina Detheridge and Mike Detheridge. ISBN 1853468525

More than Words: Helping parents promote communication and social skills in children with Autism with accompanying DVD, Fern Sussman. ISBN 0921145144

Playing Laughing and Learning with Children on the Autism Spectrum: A Practical Resource of Play Ideas for Parents and Carers, Julia Moor. ISBN 1843100606

Relationship Development Intervention with Young Children, Steven Gutstein and Rachelle Sheely. ISBN 1843107147

Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) materials. DfE publication.
Website: www.education.gov.uk

Supporting Communication Disorders: A Handbook for Teachers and Teaching Assistants, Gill Thompson. ISBN 1843120305

Teaching Children with Autism to Mind-Read, Patricia Howlin and others.
ISBN 9780471976233

Teaching Children with Autism: Strategies to Enhance Communication and Socialization, Kathleen Ann Quill. ISBN 0827362692

Teaching Young Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders: A Practical Guide for Parents and Staff in Mainstream Schools and Nurseries, Liz Hannah. ISBN 1899280324

The Handbook of Autism: A Guide for parents and professionals, Maureen Aarons and Tessa Gittens. ISBN 0415160359

The World of the Autistic Child: Understanding and Treating Autistic Spectrum Disorders, Bryna Siegel. ISBN 0195119177

Treatment of Autistic Children, Patricia Howlin and Michael Rutter. ISBN 0471926388

Understanding and Teaching Children with Autism, Rita Jordan and Stuart Powell.
ISBN 0471957143

Understanding Other Minds: Perspectives From Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience, Simon Baron-Cohen. ISBN 0198524455

Resources to support the development of social skills

Autism and Play, Jannik Beyer and Lone Gammeltoft. ISBN 1853028452

Comic Strip Conversations, Carol Gray. ISBN 9781885477224

Developing Play and Drama in Children In Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders, Dave Sherratt and Melanie Peter. ISBN 1853466972

Developing Pupils' Social Communication Skills: Practical Resources, Penny Barratt et al. ISBN 1853467286

Do-Watch-Listen-Say: Social and Communication Intervention for Children with Autism, Kathleen Ann Quill. ISBN 1557664536

Educational Interventions for Children with Autism: A literature review of recent and current research, Rita Jordan, Glenys Jones and Dinah Murray. ISBN 0855228385

Entering into Interaction, Wendy Prevezer. Wendy Newson Centre, Website: www.sutherlandhouse.org.uk

First Steps to Emotional Literacy, Kate Ripley. ISBN 9781843124153

Giggle Time: Establishing the Social Connection: A Programme to Develop the Communication Skills of Children with Autism, Susan Aud Sonders. ISBN 1843107163

Incorporating Social Goals in the Classroom: A Guide for Teachers and Parents of Children with High-Functioning Autism and Asperger Syndrome, Rebecca A Moyes. ISBN 185302967

My Social Stories Book, Carol Gray and Abbie Leigh White ISBN 1853029505

Play and Imagination in Children with Autism, Pamela J Wolfberg. ISBN 080773814X

Social Awareness Skills for Children, Marianna Csoti. ISBN 1843100037

Supporting Children with Autism in Mainstream Schools, Diana Seach, Michele Lloyd and Miranda Preston. ISBN 1841900559

The Transporters DVD, Simon Baron-Cohen. The Transporters is a fun new animation series designed to help young people with autism discover the world of emotions. Website: www.transporters.tv

References for ASD Guidelines

- Alone Together: Making an Asperger Marriage Work, Katrin Bentley. ISBN 1843105373
- An Asperger Dictionary of Everyday Expressions, Ian Stuart-Hamilton. ISBN 1843105187
- Asperger Syndrome and Bullying: Strategies and solutions, Nick Dubin. ISBN 1843108461
- Asperger Syndrome and Sensory Issues: Practical solutions for making sense of the world, Brenda Smith Myles et al. ISBN 0967251486
- Asperger Syndrome and Social Relationships: Adults Speak Out About Asperger Syndrome - Genevieve Edmonds and Luke Beardon. ISBN 9781843106470
- Asperger Syndrome: A Different Mind (DVD), Simon Baron-Cohen. ASIN 1843104717
- Asperger's Syndrome: A Guide for Parents and Professionals, Tony Attwood. ISBN 1853025771
- Asperger's Syndrome: The Universe and Everything, Kenneth Hall. ISBN 9781853029301
- Autism and Learning: A Guide to Good Practice, Stuart Powell and Rita Jordan. ISBN 185346421X
- Autism and Me (accompanying DVD), Rory Hoy. ISBN 1843105462
- Autism and Play, Jannik Beyer and Lone Gammeltoft. ISBN 1853028452
- Autism: Professional Perspectives and Practice (Therapy in Practice), K Ellis. ISBN 041232220X
- Autism: The Search for Coherence, John Richer and Sheila Coates. ISBN 1853028886
- Autistic Spectrum Disorders in the Early Years: A Guide for Practitioners, Rita Jordan. ISBN 1898873291
- Autistic Spectrum Disorders: Good Practice Guidance (2002), DfE. Website: www.education.gov.uk
- Blue Bottle Mystery: An Asperger Adventure, Kathy Hoopmann. ISBN 1853029785
- Can I tell you about Asperger Syndrome?: A Guide for Friends and Family, Jude Welton. ISBN 1843102064
- Children with Autism: Strategies for accessing the curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4 (2004), North West SEN Regional Partnership. Website: www.teachernet.gov.uk
- Comic Strip Conversations, Carol Gray. ISBN 9781885477224
- Communication Issues in Autism and Asperger Syndrome, Olga Bogdashina. ISBN 1843102676
- Developing the Emotionally Literate School, Dr Katherine Weare. ISBN 0761940863
- Enabling Communication in Children with Autism, Carol Potter and Chris Whittaker. ISBN 1853029564

Excellence and Enjoyment: Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) (2005), DfE. Website: www.publications.teachernet.gov.uk

Experiences of the Whole Family: A Booklet for Families of a Child with a Diagnosis of Autism, B Nally. ISBN 1899280227

First Steps to Emotional Literacy, Kate Ripley. ISBN 1843124157

Freaks, Geeks and Asperger Syndrome: A User Guide to Adolescence, Luke Jackson. ISBN 1843100983

Friendships: The Aspie Way, Wendy Lawson. ISBN 184310427X

Just take a bite: Effective Answers to Food Aversions and Eating Challenges, Lori Ernsperger and Tania Stegen-Hanson. ISBN 1932565124

Martian in the Playground: Understanding the Schoolchild with Asperger's Syndrome, Clare Sainsbury. ISBN 1849200009

Meeting the Needs of Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders, Rita Jordan and Glenys Jones. ISBN 1853465828

Mental Health Aspects of Autism and Asperger Syndrome, Mohammad Ghaziuddin. ISBN 1843107333

PATHS Preschool: Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies: Instructor's Manual (2004), C E Domitrovitch, C Kusche, M Greenburg & R Cortes. Website: www.channing-bete.com

People with Autism Behaving Badly: Helping People with ASD Move on from Behavioural and Emotional Challenges, John Clements. ISBN 1843107651

Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL): Improving behaviour, Improving learning (2005), DfE. Website: www.nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk

Supporting the Families of Children with Autism, P Randall and J Parker. ISBN 0471982180

Teaching Children with Autism to Mind-Read, Patricia Howlin et al. ISBN 9780471976233

That's not Fair, Carol Peters, Early Years Support Team, Leicester City Council. ISBN 9781905722334. Website: www.nas.org.uk

The New Social Story Book, Carol Gray. ISBN 1935274058

Through the Eyes of Aliens, Jasmine Lee O'Neill. ISBN 1853027103

Understanding Regulation Disorders of Sensory Processing in Children Management Strategies for Parents and Professionals, Pratibha Reebye and Aileen Stalker. ISBN 1843105217

What did you say? What do you mean?: An illustrated guide to understanding metaphors, Jude Welton. ISBN 1843102072

Working with Parents as Partners in SEN, Eileen Gascoigne. ISBN 9781853463754

Writing Social Stories with Carol Gray: DVD and accompanying Workbook. ASIN 1932565604

Useful websites

National Autistic Society (NAS): www.nas.org.uk

Hampshire Autistic Society: www.has.org.uk

The National Strategies: www.nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk

Mindblindness, theory of mind: www.autismresearchcentre.com

Information on Circles of Friends: www.autismnetwork.org

For information on social stories, social understanding, comic book conversations etc:
www.thegraycenter.org

Exploring Feelings: Cognitive Behaviour Therapy to Manage Anxiety and Anger:
www.tonyattwood.com.au

Resource and activity sheets

For use in staff training, planning, monitoring, etc.

- Resource sheet 1: The autistic spectrum
- Resource sheet 2: Characteristics of autism
- Resource sheet 3: The spectrum of impairments
- Resource sheet 4: Transition checklist
- Resource sheet 5: Individual pupil profile
- Resource sheet 6: The pupil with pragmatic difficulties

The autistic spectrum

Autism is a developmental disability

Organically based

Lifelong

Results in:

- social problems
- communication problems
- cognitive problems
- behaviour problems

Characteristics vary

Co-exists with other disabilities

Even mild autistic features cannot be ignored

Characteristics of autism

1 Social relationships and interactions

Lack of appropriate social interaction and empathy
Poor integration of social, communicative and emotional cues
Little interest in sharing pride or pleasure with other people
Difficulties making and sustaining friendships
Social naivety

2 Social communication and language

Lack of or inappropriate social chat
Idiosyncratic, unusual use of language
Literal understanding
Inappropriate use of gestures, eye contact or facial expressions
Difficulties maintaining a topic of conversation
Difficulties adapting communication to different social contexts

3 Social understanding and imagination

Limited range of imagination, interests and activities
Repetitive, rigid routines
Distress at, or resistance to, change
Circumscribed interest patterns
Focus on 'parts' rather than 'wholes' in context

Donna Williams (1996) describes her own experiences:

“I am diagnosed as having autism. If you ask me what the word means, I would tell you that, for me, it is about having trouble with **connections**....this also causes trouble with **tolerance** and trouble with **control**.”

The spectrum of impairments

Impairment of social relationships and interactions

- 1 Aloofness and indifference to others.
- 2 Passive acceptance of social approaches by others.
- 3 Makes social approaches to others which are one-sided, and may indulge in strange or unusual interests, eg railway timetables, vacuum cleaners, plastic bottles.
- 4 Makes social contact, but lacks understanding of subtle rules of social behaviour.

Impairment of social communication and language

- 1 Absence of any desire to communicate with others.
- 2 Communication confined to the expression of needs only.
- 3 Makes factual comments, not part of a social exchange, and often irrelevant to the social context.
- 4 Talks a great deal, but regardless of response of listeners, and does not engage in reciprocal conversation.

Impairment of social understanding and imagination

- 1 Copying and pretend play are absent.
- 2 May copy actions of others, but without understanding meaning and purpose.
- 3 Repetitive and stereotyped enacting of a role, but without variation and empathy, eg a TV or video character.
- 4 Awareness that something goes on in the minds of others, but has no strategies to discover what this may be. (Minimally impaired people appear to have ability to recognise others' feelings, but this is learnt rather than empathetic.)

Common but not essential features

- Language difficulties
- Abnormal responses to sensory experiences, over-sensitive, processing difficulties
- Abnormal visual inspection, eg uses peripheral vision, little eye contact
- Motor control, eg flaps, rocks, tiptoe walking, clumsiness
- Inappropriate emotional reactions, lack of reaction, excessive fear
- Special skills, eg drawing, music, mathematics
- Atypical attentional patterns, difficulties in switching and maintaining attention outside of their immediate interests.

Transition checklist

Task	Notes
Clarified team roles and responsibilities	
Information gathered from parents	
Information gathered from feeder school	
Information gathered from Educational Psychology, Speech and Language Therapy, etc	
Organised in-service staff training	
Planned learning environment	
Planned routines and structure	
Made contingency plans and disseminated to those involved	
Planned strategies to ensure consistency and two-way communication	
Identified staff support network and ways of accessing it	
Checked individual education plan includes targets relating to social, emotional and pragmatic skills	
Checked differentiation needed for National Curriculum	
Notified staff of pupil's strengths and weaknesses and preferred learning style	

Individual pupil profile

Name _____ Key worker _____

This page should contain a summary of the key information needed by any member of staff (eg each subject teacher in a secondary school, a supply teacher, etc).

Profile	Strategies
Skills and abilities	
Difficulties	
Current targets 1	
2	
3	
Rewards	
Sanctions	
Crisis management plan	

The pupil with pragmatic difficulties

Pragmatics

‘The rules governing the use of language in context’.

Pupils with pragmatic difficulties may:

- 1 fail to make sense of the world
- 2 experience problems understanding unfamiliar situations
- 3 have slow, rigid and often bizarre concept development
- 4 misinterpret situations and behave inappropriately
- 5 give apparently bizarre answers in class because they seem relevant to them
- 6 ask apparently irrelevant questions because they seem relevant to them or they are trying to sort out their confusion or in order to avoid being asked questions
- 7 stick to a familiar topic to avoid the conversation moving out of their control
- 8 hang on to their own view of the world, even when everyone else is behaving differently
- 9 develop obsessive behaviours to help them control their anxiety
- 10 become angry quickly when confused
- 11 behave inappropriately (may be perceived as deliberately naughty) because they have misunderstood the situation
- 12 not be able to start a task without individual teacher reassurance
- 13 prefer to work alone because difficulties with group interactions raises anxiety level
- 14 not notice what everyone else is doing, e.g. in PE, continue to do what they believe they should be doing rather than following the others
- 15 not pick up new skills from observing others
- 16 not be able to transfer learning without support, e.g. same sums on a different worksheet
- 17 be very good at logic but have difficulty applying it to new problems.

Intervention strategies

Understanding the pupil's difficulties is the key to intervening successfully.

- 1 Anticipate and plan for likely difficulties.
- 2 'Walk' the pupil through new routines.
- 3 Develop routines for things the pupil finds stressful.
- 4 Use visual prompts/key words to help the pupil tune-in.
- 5 Keep language as literal as possible.
- 6 Avoid sarcasm and cynicism, be careful with humour as the pupil may feel he or she is being mocked.
- 7 Try to make sense of any inappropriate response, so that you can help sort out any confusions.
- 8 Re-state the topic of conversation.
- 9 Teach social skills e.g. eye contact, turn-taking in conversations, appropriate questioning, valuing the views of others.

Anxiety, obsessions and tantrums

- View as the means by which the pupil is communicating that he or she has a problem.
- Use this information to help you anticipate and avoid future problems.
- Reassure the pupil and allow him or her time and space to calm down.
- Agree strategies for coping with similar situations with pupil, peers and staff.
- Teach pupil better strategies.

Glossary

The following terms are commonly used in relation to autism.

Asperger's syndrome

A condition with strong similarities to autism, but where the individual's early language development is not delayed and may even be precocious. Language, however, is still used in a stilted and stereotyped manner. Intellectually, individual's with Asperger's syndrome usually function in the normal range of ability.

Atypical autism

A diagnosis usually reserved for those individuals who display the characteristics of autism in two of the three key areas.

Developmental receptive language disorder

A disorder characterised by a difficulty in understanding speech and language.

Echolalia

A term referring to the repetition of words or phrases. Echolalia may occur immediately after the phrases have been said, or may be delayed and occur some time later.

Elective mutism

A disorder characterised by mutism in specific situations (i.e. the child speaks only in certain circumstances). Often there is evidence of extreme shyness and sensitivity.

Epilepsy

A group of conditions resulting from abnormal electrical discharges in the brain which can produce seizures and disturbances of consciousness.

Fragile X syndrome

An inherited chromosomal abnormality that leads to learning difficulties.

Hyperlexia

The ability to read fluently and often with correct expression, but without understanding the meaning of the text.

Pervasive developmental disorder

This is a term often used synonymously with autism when there are insufficient features for the diagnosis of autism.

Pragmatics

Are defined as the rules governing the use of language in a given context or culture. The individual with pragmatic difficulties lacks awareness of these rules and of the needs of their conversational partner.

Savant abilities

Having special talents, often in music, drawing or calculation, much in advance of other skill levels.

Semantics

Are defined as 'understanding the precise meaning of words'. Semantic difficulties involve failing to understand words and to differentiate meaning.

Specific language delay

Where language is delayed in relation to overall development.

TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped Children)

An educational intervention programme, which uses structured teaching, visual and systematic systems to develop independent working. Further information about the approach is contained in The National Autistic Society book Approaches to autism (see recommended reading).

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