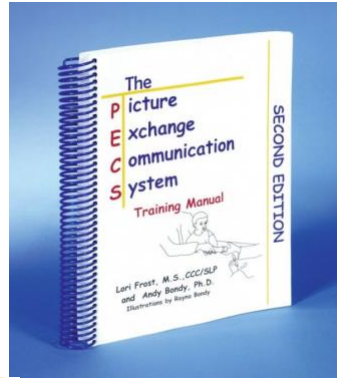




Autism Policy



'Equal opportunities lie at the heart of all that we do at Woolgrove. We are committed to ensuring that every member of the school community, whatever their position, race, gender, disability or religion is given the same chance as any other to access the services and support of the school'.

Sue Pitchers and Louise Baldwin: February 2021
Review Date: February 2024

AUTISM POLICY

This policy should be read in conjunction with other school policies, including: Child Protection, EYFS, Communication, Personal, Social and Health Education Policy, Transition Policy, Promoting Positive Behaviour Policy, SEND Policy and Equality Policy.

Intent

At Woolgrove School we aim to:

- Provide a setting where all pupils are challenged to achieve their full potential.
- Meet the academic, social, emotional and communication needs of all our pupils on the Autism Spectrum.
- Create a safe, caring and supportive learning environment that is well organised, stimulating and based on fun and enjoyment.
- Match a holistic curriculum to each child to take into account their personal interests and needs encouraging all children to be able to be confident independent learners.
- Promote positive behaviour and wellbeing by addressing the sensory and communication needs of each child.
- Work closely with parents/carers and other professionals ensuring that all aspects of each pupil's progress and development is fully inclusive, shared and supported.

Autism

Pupils with autism are included in every class throughout the school. The National Autistic Society describes autism as

'a lifelong, developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with and relates to other people, and how they experience the world around them.'

Autism is a spectrum of difficulties. All children with Autism share certain characteristics but the difficulties affect each individual pupil in different ways. Each pupil has their own strengths and challenges and as a child grows and develops these may change. Autism affects communication, social understanding, and flexibility in thinking and behaviour. This is known commonly as the 'Triad of Impairments'. (Wing & Gould 1979). In addition to this, there can be sensory difficulties.

The primary challenges can be defined as:

Difficulties in:

- non-verbal and verbal communication
- social understanding and social behaviour
- thinking and behaving flexibly (rigidity of thought)
- sensory perception and responses.

1. Communication and Language. Pupils with Autism may have trouble with expressing and projecting themselves and difficulty understanding all levels of communication.

Pupils with Autism may:

- Have a literal understanding of language and find metaphors such as 'get your skates on' difficult or phrases such as 'we're going *down* the road to the shops'. Pupils with Autism may not know what the word '*that*' is referring to in the instruction 'Don't do that'.
- Make little or inconsistent eye contact and may not listen to people.
- Fail to, or being slow to, respond to someone calling their name or to other verbal attempts to gain attention.
- Have difficulties with the back and forth of a conversation.
- Often talk at length about a favourite subject without noticing that others are not interested or without giving others a chance to respond.
- Have an unusual tone of voice that may sound sing-song or flat and robot-like
- Be echolalic.
- Non-verbal.

2. Impairment in social relationships/skills/interaction.

Pupils with Autism may have:

- Difficulties in interpreting other people's facial expressions and body language
- Trouble understanding another person's point of view or being unable to predict or understand other people's actions
- Reduced understanding others' feelings & emotions
- Rarely share enjoyment of objects or activities by pointing or showing things to others
- Difficulties in acting appropriately in social interaction situations and consequently may have difficulties in forming appropriate friendships.
- A manner that appears aloof, stilted and shy or forthright, aggressive, or rude.
- Facial expressions, movements, and gestures that do not match what is being said
- Difficulties in expressing emotions in a way that is easily understood even though people with autism have the same emotions as everybody else.

3. Impaired Imagination.

Pupils with Autism may have:

- Difficulty in imagining things which have not already been experienced so new or different situations can be frightening.
- Difficulties in accepting changes in routine that are frightening / disorientating without the ability to imagine an alternative order of events.
- Difficulties in realizing/comprehending that other people's mental states are different from their own and appreciate that other people have their own thoughts, perspectives, plans and feelings.
- Have difficulties with generalisations.

4. Sensory difficulties.

Pupils with Autism may have:

- Sensory issues involving both **hyper-sensitivities** (over-responsiveness) and **hypo-sensitivities** (under-responsiveness) to a wide range of stimuli such as sight, sound, smell, taste and touch.
- Difficulties with balance and special orientation (vestibular).
- Body awareness (proprioception) which allows for awareness of location, movement, joint position, muscle force, and effort and kinaesthesia which is the ability to perceive the extent, direction, or weight of movement.
- Body awareness (interoception) which is the ability to understanding and feel what is going on inside your body such as feeling hungry, full, hot, cold or thirsty which impacts on self-regulation.

Implementation

We strive to ensure that pupils on the autistic spectrum are able to access the broad, balanced and relevant curriculum offered to pupils throughout our school. We take into account the additional difficulties and characteristics of Autism in all aspects of the pupils school life, including the school environment, planning, the teaching and learning and the progress. The emphasis is on communication, social interaction, and the independence and emotional well being of the individual pupil.

Identifying need

We identify each child's individual needs by discussing each child with parents/carers, any other professionals involved with the child, carrying out observations, reading the child's Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) and by completing a Sensory Profile. We write individual Wellbeing Plans for children who have sensory difficulties so that all staff are informed of each child's challenges. These are regularly reviewed with staff and parents/carers.

Curriculum

We adapt and modify the Curriculum for individual learners according to their needs and interests to promote access to all aspects of the learning being offered at Woolgrove School. We offer five different pathways that the children can follow according to their age, ability, learning style and individual needs. Each pathway follows a modified and personalised holistic curriculum and there is a great emphasis on communication. A visually supportive approach (based on the TEACCH Approach, Mesibov, Shea, & Schopler 2005) is used to ensure that pupils understand what is expected of them, and to enable them to anticipate what comes next. This involves the use of visual timetables, and a structured environment plus consistency of approach. The school also uses the intervention model SCERTS (Social Communication, Emotional Regulation and Transactional Support) (Prizant, Wetherby, Rubin, Laurent & Rydell, 2006) to help the pupils with autism to become a competent and confident social communicator and an active learner.

The pupils are offered 1-1 teaching times for the learning of new skills and vocabulary, as well as times when pupils are encouraged to work independently, or in a group with adult guidance. Regular physical exercise and breaks are incorporated into the daily timetable to develop gross motor skills and to help to alleviate any anxiety due to sensory overload.

Life skills are an important part of the pupils' development, including community-based trips. Independence and emotional development of the pupils is developed through the PSHE and Life Skills element of the curriculum. Social Stories (Gray,1997) and concept cartoons are sometimes used to aid the understanding of the feelings of others and the consequences of actions.

Environment

We strive to ensure that the environment at the school is suitable for pupils with autism and endeavour to make any reasonable adjustments to modify the environment such as reducing sound. We actively encourage the use of equipment such as weighted blankets and fiddle toys to address the needs of our pupils with autism. We reduce environmental anxiety and distress by providing an environment which is calm and comfortable with as few distractions as possible with clear structures and routines. We also encourage our pupils to ask for help with adjusting their environment if needed. We teach coping strategies such as requesting a walk or to move to a quiet area, requesting stress management and relaxation techniques, the use of sensory items to chew or requesting an alternative appropriate activity.

Communication

We use augmented forms of communication such as signing and the 'Woolgrove Object, Photo, Symbol communication'. This is based on the SCERTs principles and the Picture Exchange Communication system (PECs). We use a communication book or iPad app such as sound board maker/Grid Player 2. We use Widgit symbols and talker overlays. We advocate the use of real objects, objects or reference, photographs of objects or symbols depending on the child's level of understanding. We also use Integrated Visual Coding (IVC) where each part of a sentence is colour coded to aid communication. We use timetables, social stories and concept cartoons to aid understanding.

If appropriate, pupils will access one to one intensive interaction, where staff will encourage pupils to respond to sounds in conversation like exchanges, which may lead to copying of words and phrases. Staff will also encourage turn taking exchanges within group situations such as 'Attention Autism' sessions.

Therapies

The school also benefits from a range of therapeutic interventions that support individuals and groups of children. These include Speech and Language Therapy, Music Therapy, Rebound Therapy, Lego Therapy and Sensory Circuits focusing on fine and gross motor skills. We also have the use of Kaspar robot at Woolgrove School. Kaspar is an expressive robot that offers a more predictable and initially repetitive form of communication, which aims to make social interaction simpler and more comfortable for a child with autism. Our Pastoral Support worker runs clubs such as the Tool Kit club in our environment area and provides resources to support individual children and their families and carers.

Assessment and monitoring

Provision for pupils on the autistic spectrum is regularly monitored and evaluated as part of the school's self-evaluation process. Extra input from The Advisory Teacher for Autism and individual observations can be arranged.

Training

Regular training is carried out with staff so all staff are able to support pupils with autism. Some staff members have additional specific training in aspects of autism and support other staff in meetings and behaviour workshops. We also have access to external trainers and advisors such as the Herts Communication and Autism Team.

Partnership with Parents

Each child has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) which reflects their personal needs and aims. The aims and objectives and provision on the EHCPs are reviewed at least every year together with the parents/carers. The aims are broken down into smaller achievable steps on the pupil's Individual Provision Map (IPM) which are reviewed three times a year, again with parents/carers.

Parents are regarded as essential partners in helping their children to learn and develop. Parents and carers are welcome to arrange to visit the school, or can telephone to discuss any problems. Parent workshops on a range of themes are run by the school. Celebration afternoons are held termly for parents of all pupils.

Impact

At Woolgrove School pupils with autism will:

1. Be successful in managing their sensory and behavioural needs within the supportive Woolgove environment to be able to learn and develop in all areas of learning.
2. Become confident and active learners and to know how to problem solve or ask for help.
3. Enjoy and thrive in the learning environment and make progress and achieve their full potential.
4. Be able to live as independently as possible and make a positive contribution to society.

Key staff

Head teacher:	Lisa Hall
Deputy Head teacher:	Vicky Litchfield (and Head of EYFS and Pre- Formal Learners)
Deputy Head teacher:	Richard Pritchard (Behaviour lead and Safeguarding and Wellbeing)
Heads of Departments:	Vicky Litchfield (and Head of EYFS and Pre- Formal Learners) Sue Pitchers (Head of Semi-Formal and Formal Learners and Autism lead)
INCO	Louise Baldwin (and Autism Lead second)
Governor with Autism responsibility	John Hayes
Speech & Language Therapist	Laura Stevens and Alice Greenfield
Speech & Language Assistant	Rebecca Pickles