

2026

Autism And ADHD Policy



**Woolgrove School,
Special Needs Academy**

Live, Laugh and Learn
Together

Owner: Headteacher
Authored by: Subject Leads
Adopted by: SLT
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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, Curriculum 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 with Autism and ADHD.
- 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 consider their personal interests and needs, encouraging all children 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.
- Empower all people affected by ADHD through evidence-based resources and education.

Autism and ADHD

Pupils with Autism and ADHD 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.'

NICE guidelines state that

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is defined as a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with functioning or development.

All children with Autism and ADHD share certain characteristics, but the challenges affect each pupil in different ways. Each pupil has their own strengths and challenges; as a child grows and develops, these may change.

Girls with Autism

Autistic girls are often overlooked because traditional ideas of autism were based on male-centered stereotypes; this leads to missed or late diagnoses, masking of traits, and misinterpretation as mental health issues. The autistic characteristics in girls may look different — for example, more subtle social difficulties, interests that appear typical but are unusually intense, or being part of friendship groups that hide underlying challenges. Diagnostic tools and professional knowledge have historically focused on traits more common in boys, contributing to a long-standing gender gap in diagnosis, even though newer research suggests the true ratio is closer to 3:1 than older estimates (National Autistic Society).

The primary challenges of Autism and ADHD

Autism affects communication, social understanding, and flexibility in thinking and behaviour. This is commonly known as the 'Triad of Impairments'. (Wing & Gould 1979). In addition to this, there can be issues with sensory processing.

The primary challenges of autism can be defined as:

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

The primary challenges of ADHD can be defined as:

- cognitive and academic
- behavioural and emotional
- social
- daily life and executive functioning

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 of 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 realising/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 spatial orientation (vestibular).
- Difficulties with body awareness (proprioception), which allows for awareness of location, movement, joint position, muscle force, and effort and kinesthesia, which is the ability to perceive the extent, direction, or weight of movement.
- Difficulties with body awareness (interoception), which is the ability to understand and feel what is going on inside your body, such as feeling hungry, full, hot, cold or thirsty, which impacts on self- regulation.

5. Cognitive & academic

Pupils with ADHD may show:

- Task initiation difficulty — starting non-preferred tasks is hard because they don't feel immediately rewarding.
- Motivation differences — the brain needs a higher perceived reward to trigger action, so everyday tasks feel overwhelming.
- Working memory challenges — holding multiple steps in mind, following instructions, and completing multi-step work is difficult.
- Academic impact — children may understand the material but struggle to organise, sequence, and complete tasks like maths problems or essays.
- Test performance issues — timed or highly structured assessments don't match their processing style, leading to lower scores despite good understanding.

6. Behavioural and emotional

Pupils with ADHD may show:

- Hyperactivity & impulsivity — fidgeting, difficulty sitting still, interrupting, and acting without thinking.
- Emotional dysregulation — frustration, low self-esteem, and emotional outbursts, especially when tasks feel hard or failures repeat.
- Routine management difficulties — mornings and daily tasks (waking up, dressing, getting ready) are stressful due to distractibility and time-management challenges.

7. Social

Pupils with ADHD may show:

- Working-memory difficulties — hard to track conversations, remember social rules, or respond appropriately, leading to repeated social mistakes.
- Impulsivity in interactions — interrupting, dominating conversations, or struggling to wait their turn can affect forming and keeping friendships.
- Hyperactivity impact — constant movement or restlessness can make peer interactions feel mismatched or overwhelming.
- Social-emotional consequences — these challenges can lead to frustration, isolation, or feeling misunderstood.

8. Daily life and executive functioning

Pupils with ADHD may show:

- Executive-function challenges — difficulties with planning, organising, and completing everyday tasks.
- Forgetfulness & disorganisation — frequently losing items, forgetting responsibilities, and struggling to follow routines without support.
- Multi-step task difficulty — long or multi-step tasks are hard because they rely on sustained attention, working memory, and impulse control.
- Low-reward task avoidance — tasks that aren't immediately interesting or rewarding are especially challenging to start and complete.

Implementation

We strive to ensure that pupils with Autism and ADHD 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 and ADHD in all aspects of the pupils' school life, including the school environment, planning, teaching and learning and progress. The emphasis is on self-regulation, 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), through the use of our assessment tool Trackable and using our Individual Learner Characteristics Profile.

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 using our Individual Learner Characteristics Profile. 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 and self-regulation. A visually supportive approach is used to ensure that pupils understand what is happening now and what is expected of them, and to enable them to anticipate what comes next. This involves the use of visual timetables, a structured environment plus consistency of approach.

The pupils are offered 1-1 learning opportunities for the teaching of new skills and vocabulary, as well as the opportunity 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 ADHD 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 follow a total communication approach for 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 of reference, object cues, 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, now/next boards and concept cartoons to aid understanding. All staff have had training on supporting pupils who are Gestalt Language Processors.

Where appropriate, pupils will access one-to-one intensive interaction. 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, Rebound Therapy, Lego Therapy and Sensory Circuits focusing on fine and gross motor skills. Our Pastoral Support workers are able to provide resources to support individual children and their families and carers.

Assessment and monitoring

Currently, approximately 70% of the pupils at Woolgrove have an autism diagnosis. Provision for pupils with Autism and ADHD is regularly monitored and evaluated as part of the school's self-evaluation process.

Training

Regular training is carried out with staff so all staff can support pupils with autism and ADHD. Some staff members have additional specific training in aspects of autism or ADHD and support other staff in meetings and behaviour workshops. We also have access to external trainers and advisors, such as the Hertfordshire's SEND SAS Speech, Language, Communication and Autism advisory service, and SPACE.

Partnership with Parents

Each child has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) which reflects their personal needs and aims. The aims, 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 and ADHD will:

1. Be successful in managing their sensory and behavioural needs within the supportive Woolgrove environment to be able to learn and develop in all areas of learning.
2. Become confident and active learners and 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 (Head of EYFS and Pre- Formal Learners)
Deputy Head teacher:	Richard Pritchard (Behaviour, Safeguarding and Wellbeing Lead)
Heads of Departments:	Vicky Litchfield (Head of EYFS and Pre- Formal Learners) Julian Wild (Head of Semi-Formal and Formal Learners)
Inclusion Coordinator (INCo)	Kate Chiddy
Autism/ADHD leads	Sharon Streater and Sally Dawson
Speech & Language Therapists	Charlotte Marley and Frances Fell