



Rosebank School

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A GUIDE TO THE THEORY AND PRACTISE OF MEETING THE NEEDS OF PUPILS WITH AUTISTIC SPECTRUM CONDITION IN ROSEBANK SCHOOL

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ROSEBANK SCHOOL **MEETING THE NEEDS OF PUPILS WITH ASC**

RATIONALE

At Rosebank School we maintain a guide to the theory and practise of meeting the needs of pupils with ASC to ensure a consistent understanding of ASC across the school community, and ensure that practise is based on reliable, up to date research to benefit the holistic education of all our pupils.

"Understanding children with autism may be intellectually demanding and educating them is certainly challenging ... it is not possible to do the latter effectively without first understanding the former."

(Jordan and Powell, 1995, p165)

This policy supports and is supported by the following Rosebank policy statements:

- Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy
- Behaviour Support and Management Policy
- Policy for Continuing Professional Development
- ASC Induction Plan

A DEFINITION OF AUTISM

Autism is a pervasive developmental disorder of organic origin which affects language and communication skills, social interaction and the ability to think and behave flexibly. It may also affect the ability to process sensory input and information.

- **Language and Communication Skills**

Involving difficulty with both the understanding and use of non-verbal communication including gesture, facial awareness, body language and the timing of interactions as well as problems with specific aspects of language.

- **Social Development**

Involving a lack of awareness and understanding of relationships with others, characterised by a lack of attention to people, unresponsiveness to people, a lack of awareness of the feelings of others and difficulty in understanding and conforming to 'social rules'.

- **Thought and Behaviour**

Characterised by a rigidity and inflexibility which can affect every area of the child's thinking, language and behaviour. Examples of this inflexibility can be seen in ritualised and obsessive patterns of behaviour, over-literal interpretations of other people's language, and difficulties with tasks requiring imagination or divergent thinking.

For a diagnosis of autism to be considered, all of the above three characteristics should be apparent and out of keeping with the child's cognitive age. The Triad of Impairment form the basis of the diagnostic criteria used by the World Health Organisation (ICD-10). The American Psychiatric Association (DSM-V) have reviewed the triad of difficulties and have included difficulties in sensory processing as a criteria for a diagnosis of ASC.

- **Sensory Processing**

Children may be hyper (over) or hypo (under) sensitive to particular stimuli in any of the senses; Sight, Hearing, Taste, Touch, Smell, Proprioception and Vestibular System. For example, they may react as if in pain to certain noises, textures, tasks or smells. In contrast to this, they may sometimes appear to have a high tolerance to pain or to cold. Many children with autism have a preference for a very restricted range of foods. They may also have difficulty in establishing a good sleeping pattern. Digestive difficulties, especially bowel problems, are also common.

The autistic spectrum includes people with a wide range of needs and skills. Autism may be associated with behavioural difficulties as well as complex learning difficulties. Some people with ASC may have strengths in particular areas, e.g. ICT, maths, art.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF AUTISM

The Triad of Impairments describe observable behaviours. Theories have been put forward, and tested, to provide an explanation, at a psychological level, as to why these behaviours occur. These theories can be helpful in developing our ability to understand and to respond to pupils with autism.

- **Theory of Mind**

'Theory of Mind' is the ability to think about one's own mental activity (thoughts, feelings, beliefs) and to be aware that other people also have minds with different thoughts, feelings and beliefs. We can predict what other people may be thinking or feeling by interpreting facial expression, body language, the situation, etc. Based on this information we can make predictions about what others may be about to do and can modify our behaviour accordingly.

Simon Baron Cohen (1993), amongst others, has suggested that children with autism lack this 'Theory of Mind' or that it develops very slowly and perhaps only after specific teaching and through different neurological pathways.

- **Central Coherence Theory** (Frith, 1989)

This theory suggests that children with autism focus on one isolated aspect of a situation picture or object, rather than taking in all the information and processing it for (social) meaning. For example, young children with autism may be preoccupied with spinning the wheels of a bike rather than understanding the function of the object as a whole.

- **Executive Function Deficit** (Pennington & Ozonoff, 1996)

This theory suggests that people with autism have difficulty in planning a sequence of events to achieve a specified goal. This has implications for many simple daily tasks such as dressing, as well as for classroom activities.

These theories, all interlinked, can help us to a fuller understanding of the difficulties faced by children with autism by giving us some insight into how they may view the world. Research is on-going to find biological explanations for these psychological difficulties.

WHAT WE NEED TO DO TO MEET THE NEEDS OF PUPILS WITH AUTISM

It is essential when working with and supporting pupils with autism that we have:

- (1) A clear understanding of the Triad of Impairment, the psychology of autism and associated difficulties, including sensory processing difficulties.
- (2) A good understanding of the individual needs of each child, developed through observation and assessment and through liaison with the child's family and with other professionals.
- (3) A wide range of autism-specific practices and interventions through which individual needs can be met.
- (4) Effective behaviour management and support strategies.
- (5) Policies and monitoring systems which are effective in ensuring that pupils with autism progress and develop as individuals, as members of the school community and of their wider communities.

To ensure a clear understanding of the Triad of Impairment and associated difficulties, staff knowledge and understanding of autism is developed and maintained through:

- CPD policy and records
- Autism induction and records
- On-going training, through staff meetings
- A range of therapeutic approaches embedded throughout the school

- Staff library of books and journals
- Ethos of critical reflection of practice and learning from each other
- Links with colleagues in other schools via partnerships, informal links

A good understanding of the needs of each child is developed through:

- Observation (informal daily notes, records in PLIMs, reports)
- Assessment (SALT assessments including PECS, Sensory assessments Autism specific assessments eg DISCO, PEP-R)
- Discussion with and information from parents (admission visits, EHCP review meetings, Parents' Evenings, parent workshops, DISCO, informal phone calls, annual reviews, home/school books)
- Discussion with and information from other professionals
- Regular meetings with Family Support Worker

A wide range of autism-specific practices and interventions are available:

COMPENSATORY STRATEGIES

Strategies which take account of the pupil's difficulties and seek to minimise them, enabling the pupil to feel calmer and thus more able to learn.

TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communicationally Handicapped Children)

TEACCH is the most important of such strategies. The key principles of TEACCH, eg structure and visual information, are practised throughout the school to enable pupils to know what they will be doing next, when it will be finished and what will happen when it is finished. Implementation of TEACCH varies across the school according to the needs of groups and individuals. Some classrooms are clearly organised along TEACCH principles with individual timetables, workstations, transition points, etc. In other classes, individual pupils may use timetables for some elements of their learning, eg making choices during unstructured times, coping with lunchtime routine, etc, or use traffic lights or wait symbols to help with specific transitions. TEACCH guidelines have been an Appendix to this policy since 1997.

Exercise

Exercise programmes can also be regarded as compensatory strategies since physical activity is known to reduce stress/anxiety levels for pupils with ASD. Planned physical activity is incorporated within class timetables on a daily basis. Individual pupils may have access to additional physical activities as part of a Behaviour Support and Management Plan.

Dietary Interventions

Dietary interventions can also be regarded as compensatory strategies. The

families of some pupils have found that following a specific dietary regime, e.g. gluten-free, casein-free, low salicylate, helps their child to be calmer.

Programmes to Meet Sensory Processing Needs

Most children develop the ability to take in information from the environment through senses/sensations e.g. sound, sight, touch and balance. For pupils with an autistic spectrum condition there may be impairments of sensory processing in one or more of the above areas. Some pupils will be over-sensitive (hyper) to certain sensations and at the same time under-sensitive (hypo) to other sensations. At Rosebank we understand the increasing need to provide opportunities/experiences for pupils to develop and learn through a sensory approach to the curriculum.

What sensory experiences do we provide to enable our pupils to stay calm and focused?

Pupils at Rosebank have individual sensory preferences and learning styles. We provide as many varied opportunities to learn through a sensory approach in as many curriculum subjects as possible. We strive for all our pupils to have interactions with their environment both inside and outside school. Sensory differences for pupils with autistic spectrum condition can impact greatly on their learning within the classroom. Through this policy we aim to minimise the sensory differences and to maximise learning opportunities for all pupils, by providing a range of sensory inputs to accompany lessons if needed.

Staff at Rosebank recognise that using too much language may cause sensory overload and raise arousal levels. For this reason, staff often adjust their use of language and in some cases use no language at all. [See: Minimal Speech Approach, Potter and Whittaker (2001)]. This is particularly relevant where children are at an early stage in their sensory and communicative development.

We provide:

- Sensory movement sessions each morning both inside and outside school. Body awareness, music and movement and '5 a day' sessions.
- Calm environment
- Work stations
- Personal timetables, 'working toward', 'now and next'
- Sensory boxes
- Treasure baskets
- Interactive whiteboard activities
- Music and singing sessions. Music and Art Therapy (for identified children)
- Light room
- Quiet rooms/break away spaces
- Individual choose boxes
- Further sensory assessment by referral to Independent Occupational Therapist
- Opportunities for choice

- 4D Immersive space
- Splash Pool
- Outside areas such as a Sensory Garden
- Pets

What do we need to know to help our pupils with their sensory processing?

As part of our baseline assessment and individual sensory planning we complete the sensory profile from Practical Sensory Programmes for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (Larkey, S, 2007) for our pupils. Sensory profiles are used to assess pupils' sensory responses and these are completed in conjunction with parents. These needs (in areas of movement, sight, touch, sound, smell and taste) are then highlighted on a Sensory Plan and Support form if appropriate within the child's Pupil Profile and commented on at least each term. Where appropriate, referral to Physiotherapist and Occupational Therapist will be made.

To complete assessments we need:

- Knowledge of each individual pupil's sensory preferences/needs, regular focused observations, understanding of individual motivators, sharing of knowledge between families and professionals involved.
- Knowledge about sensory differences and teaching approaches such as hyper/hyposensitivity, sensory differences, awareness of sensory input in each context, knowledge of assessment procedures, knowledge and understanding of learning theories and theories of autism, knowledge and understanding of specialist equipment and how to structure and implement programmes designed by professionals.

The Teaching of Problem Solving and Independence Strategies to Address a Difficulty in Flexibility of Thought and Behaviour

Pupils are given planned opportunities to acquire independence skills and once a skill is mastered, it can be practised in other settings so that the learning is generalised and consolidated.

To do this pupils are encouraged to achieve at their own level without adult support. When new skills are being taught the least intrusive prompt (usually physical) is used and gradually faded as the pupil learns the skill.

Pupils with ASC have difficulties understanding social situations and may have poor self-awareness making it difficult to function at school, home and in community environments without support. Additional thought processing difficulties including inflexibility of thought and behaviour, poor fine and gross motor skills, and sensory issues can make achieving independence problematic. These areas all need to be

addressed if a pupil is to successfully acquire independence skills.

From entering school pupils are encouraged to do things for themselves. Staff give extra time for pupils to process requests. Supportive rehearsal of everyday tasks is factored into every pupil's daily routine so that new skills are developed, and existing skills are practised and maintained.

To support pupils to become more flexible we; teach choice making skills, reassure and persevere in working towards flexibility, maintain use of visual symbols throughout the school (including the 'surprise' symbol for unexpected changes), repeat activities in different contexts to enable skills to be transferred, make planned changes around special activities such as celebrations/charity events/visiting workshops, have regular educational visits to a variety of locations, maintain clear boundaries in situations where choice is not an option, provide social stories for challenging situations, maintain excellent home/school communication.

To support pupils to become more independent and develop problem solving skills we; provide frequent opportunities to make requests, teach the use of the 'help' symbols in a variety of contexts, use 'sabotage' to prompt pupils to solve problems/seek help, give time for pupils to achieve tasks independently, teach pupils to 'take a break' when stress levels rise, use specific programmes designed by the Speech Therapists or Occupational Therapists to target skills.

The Teaching of Skills to Aid Transition

A transition is any change of location or activity. It might appear to be very small, eg moving from one part of the classroom to another, or very significant, eg moving to a new school. These are known as micro and macro transitions.

All pupils with ASC have some difficulties with flexibility of thought and behaviour – the nature and extent of these difficulties will vary from one pupil to another. Underlying reasons may include:

- Anxiety about any change
- Anxiety caused by not knowing or not being able to imagine what might happen next
- Preference for current activity/location
- Difficulty in communicating needs/preferences/feelings
- Some pupils are oppositional to any demands
- An individual pupil's ability to cope with transitions may vary according to their underlying level of stress

We can help by:

- Giving pupils advance warning of forthcoming change using communication systems appropriate to the child, eg traffic lights, timer, clear language, 'counting down'.
- Ensuring that pupils understand what they are being asked to move on to using appropriate communication systems, eg photographs, symbols, written instructions, clear verbal instructions.

- Where pupils are being asked to move to a non-preferred activity, use motivators appropriate to the child, eg 'first work, then x'.
- If pupils seem unable to make a transition, staff remain calm and relaxed, continuing to keep the visual prompt in the pupil's view. A change of personnel will often help in this situation.
- Use of individual and class timetables.

Transitions between classes:

- Staff in the receiving class need to be well informed of the pupil's needs. This is best achieved by them spending time in the pupil's current class as well as through talking to the class team and reading all records.
- The extent and means by which pupils are prepared for their new class will vary from individual to individual, but may include:
 - visits
 - social story (may be taken home during school holidays)
 - photographs (may be taken home during the school holidays)
 - Transition booklets

Transition between schools

- For pupils who are new to Rosebank, transition plans are prepared by the class teacher and Family Support Worker in collaboration with parents and staff from the child's current placement (playgroup, CDC, other school). These plans usually include visits to school, staff visits to current placement and transition booklet to be used at home.
- For pupils who are moving on from Rosebank, transition plans are prepared by the class teacher in collaboration with the Inclusion Co-ordinator, Speech and Language Therapist, Family Support Worker and parents and staff from the receiving school.

REMEDIAL STRATEGIES

Remedial strategies, ie those which specifically address one aspect of the Triad of Impairment and aim to teach new skills and understanding in that area include:

- Speech and Language Therapy programmes
- Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
- Social Skills programmes
- Role Play
- Social Stories
- Intensive Interaction
- Occupational Therapy programmes
- Music Therapy

- Art Therapy
- Lego Therapy
- Strategies based upon Behavioural Analysis
- Adapted CBT

Policies and monitoring systems which are effective in ensuring that pupils with autism progress and develop as individuals, as members of the school community and of their wider communities include:

- The NAS Accreditation Programme, which provides a framework within which Rosebank School can review provision for pupils with autism. This is incorporated within the NAS Self-Audit document which informs Rosebank School's Autism Development Plan, both of which are reviewed annually.
- Rosebank School's Policy and Framework for Monitoring and Evaluation ensures that the progress of all pupils is fully reviewed.

REFERENCES

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