

## POLICY FOR AUTISM AND SENSORY



# Dunclug Primary School

Date ratified by Board of Governors: June 2020

Date of Next Review: June 2022

## **DUNCLUG PRIMARY SCHOOL**

### **AUTISM/SENSORY POLICY**

Equal opportunities lie at the heart of all that we do at Dunclug. 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.

#### **Background**

The autistic spectrum represents a range of conditions (from Asperger's Syndrome to Autism) characterised by difficulties in social interaction and by restricted or repetitive patterns of thought and behaviour. These developmental differences are persistent, however difficulties experienced by those diagnosed as being on the spectrum can vary in severity. Current estimates state that approximately 3 in every 100 children now receive a formal diagnosis of autism. The numbers of pupils attending our school who are diagnosed with autism has risen and may well continue to rise in the foreseeable future.

This policy has been written to supplement other current policies in the school and should be considered alongside the existing policies and documents already in place particularly the school's SEN and Inclusion Policy.

#### **Rationale**

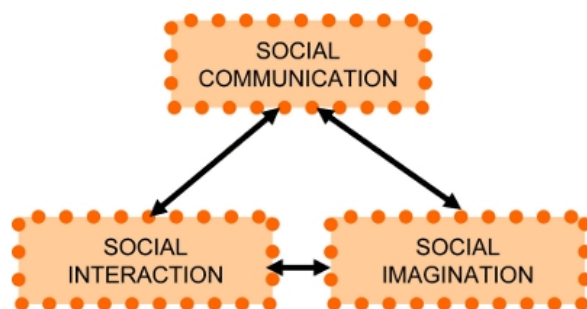
The primary characteristics of ASD are as follows:

Difficulties in:

- Non-verbal and verbal communication
- Social understanding and social behaviour
- Thinking and behaving flexibly (rigidity of thought)
- Sensory perception and responses

Autism Spectrum Disorder affects communication, social understanding, and flexibility in thinking and behaviour. This is known commonly as the 'Triad of Impairments' In addition to this, there is often a strong tendency towards repetitive behaviour. All of which can result in unusual behaviour.

#### **Triad of Impairments:**



#### **1. Impairment in social relationships/skills/interaction:**

- Lack of understanding others feelings & emotions.

- Very poor at interpreting other people's facial expressions and body language.
- Individuals may appear aloof, stilted, rude, aggressive, forthright, shy, thoughtless,
- Immature &/or act inappropriately in social interaction situations and consequently fail.
- To form 'real' lasting friendships.

**2. Impaired Imagination: is an inability to imagine things, which have not already been experienced, for example:**

- New or different situations can be unimaginable and therefore perhaps frightening.
- Changes in routine are frightening / disorientating without the ability to imagine an alternative order of events.
- Do not realise/comprehend other people's mental states are different from their own. An autistic person may not appreciate that other people have their own thoughts, perspectives, plans etc.
- Have difficulties with simplifications.

**3. Communication and Language. Autistic people have trouble with expressing and projecting themselves and difficulty understanding all levels of communication, which may manifest as:**

- A literal understanding of language. 'Pictorial language' can be nonsensical. For example, it is raining cats and dogs, we're going '*down*' the road to the shops, get your skates on or we'll be late etc.
- "Don't do that". An autistic person may not know what the word '*that*' is referring to.
- People with autism have the same emotions as everybody else - but may not express them in a way that is easily understood, partly because they may fail to realise that language is one way of doing this.
- They may talk to somebody without taking any notice of that person.

In order to ensure that pupils on the autistic spectrum are able to access the broad, balanced and relevant curriculum offered to pupils throughout our school their additional difficulties and characteristics are taken into account in all aspects of their school life, including the school environment, planning, teaching and learning objectives.

The emphasis is on communication, social interaction, and the independence and emotional well-being of the individual pupil.

**Impact on the Learner of Being on the Autistic Spectrum**

There are two types of difficulties/differences which are referred to when discussing the impact on learning that comes from being on the autistic spectrum. In general terms they are:

- Difficulties with social communication - difficulties with body language and verbal communication, reciprocal conversation, emotional and social reciprocity and managing structured parts of the day.
- Restricted interest and repetitive behaviours - difficulty with changes in routine, repetitive behaviours and rituals.

Another recognised core feature may be unusual sensory responses including over or under sensitivity to particular lights, sounds, tastes, touch or movements.

### **Aims**

Dunclug Primary School aims to meet the needs of its pupils' on the autistic spectrum by:

- Offering a variety of consistent, high quality provision.
- Ensuring that staff have access to resources and support.
- Collaborating with relevant professionals and parents/carers.
- Planning to address the individual and specific needs of pupils on the spectrum.
- Delivering a curriculum which balances social and academic need.

### **The Provision**

Pupils with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are included in every class throughout the school. The school can offer a range of provision suitable to the child and the staff are willing to try new or different approaches to find what strategies suit the individual.

A good learning environment for pupils with a diagnosis of autism includes:

- Access to up to date profile information.
  - On-going assessment on an informal observation basis.
  - The application of individualised visual structures and amendment to the physical environment where appropriate.
  - The provision of a structured environment, which will support pupils' sensory and emotional regulation.
  - Consistent communication with home and outside agencies, where applicable.
- Classroom Assistants, while supporting the individual, recognise the need to promote independence.

### **Approaches to Teaching Pupils with ASD**

A visually intensive approach 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 rules and routines.

There are direct individual teaching times for the learning of new skills, as well as times when pupils are encouraged to work independently, or in a group with adult guidance.

Regular physical exercise is incorporated into the daily timetable to develop gross motor skills and to help channel any excess energy that may cause anxiety.

Life skills are an important part of the pupils' programmes, including community-based education. Independence and emotional development of the pupils is highlighted in the PDMU element of the curriculum. Social Stories are sometimes used to aid the understanding of the feelings of others and the consequences of actions.

Other provision can include:

- Movement Breaks
- Working stations
- Sensory tents
- Cosy Den
- Use of our Hub
- Specific routines and timetables put in place

- Flashcards and visual aids
- Time for self-regulation activities
- Time activities
- Outdoor play
- First Next Then
- Social Stories
- Advice from the ASD Service
- Update sensory toys and fine motor toys
- Advice from parents
- Weighted cushions, hopper, sensory muffs etc

### **Learning Environments**

An organised and well-planned learning environment is essential for the holistic development of pupils on the autistic spectrum. All learning environments within Dunclug PS will therefore provide:

- A high level of visual support.
- The necessary amount of structure to address the needs of pupils with autism in each class.
- Low arousal environments where necessary.

### **Social Communication Skills**

Children on the autistic spectrum present with difficulties in areas of social and communication skills. Communication is fundamental to learning and therefore seen as a key area of development for all pupils. The school approaches this by providing a 'total communication environment', using sign-supported speech and symbols, as well as photographs and objects of reference if necessary, to provide clear and reinforced communication.

If appropriate, pupils will access individual 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. Individual communication books may be developed alongside the visual timetables to aid the pupil's communicative intent where necessary. The Speech and Language Therapists will develop this system along with the teachers and teaching assistants.

Other Strategies to assist these difficulties include:

- Use of schedules and activity systems.
- Social Skills Lessons
- PDMU Lessons

### **Sensory and Emotional Regulation**

Some pupils with an autistic spectrum condition have specific sensory difficulties which can result in unusual or uncomfortable perception of one or more of the following: sound, sense, touch, sight and smell. They may become upset, distracted or react in an aggressive manner due to the discomfort or pain they feel.

Reference to 'a spectrum' of difficulties is made because there is a wide variation of difficulties and needs within disorder and as a child grows and develops these may change.

The overall school ethos continues to provide a safe, caring environment for all pupils. Staff need to be in tune with sensory needs and, facilitate individualised sensory regulation strategies. For example, use of the 'Calm Area' and visual strategies within the classroom.

We therefore try to reduce environmental anxiety and distress by providing the following:

- An environment which is calm and comfortable with few distractions.
- An environment with clear structures and routines.
- The knowledge that they can ask for help and it will be provided.
- Specific sensory support to match their needs, to help them learn.
- The use of a Cosy Den, tents, working stations and The Hub that have been created in the school. This can be used as a 'time out' or timetabled strategy and has a range of resources and sensory tools to soothe individuals.
- Fidget toys.
- Deep breathing .
- Progressive muscle relaxation (tensing and relaxing parts of the body, fists, arms, legs, and whole body in sequence) .
- 'Take Ten' .

### **Training**

Pupils with ASD are supported by staff members who have specific training in aspects of Autism from the ASD Service, and from the LSC using information from the DENI SEN Resource File.

In Addition, many members of staff have received basic training in supporting pupils with ASD so awareness is spread across the school. Structure, visual support and individualised strategies appropriate for each individual are provided to aid a pupil's access to the curriculum.

The staff have also received training on Sensory Difficulties (SEN Resource File) led by the LSC (Learning Support Co-Ordinator) and are currently researching and using different resources to support pupils with sensory difficulties. Class teachers also have an ASD Guidance/Resource File that was provided from the ASD Service.

The school had 'refresh' training around ASD in 2019/20 and training sessions will be led by the LSC and ASD Service. A follow up is to be planned for 2020/21.

### **Staffing**

Each class is led by a classroom teacher. Additionally, Dunclug PS also benefits from a high level of support from classroom assistants. At Dunclug PS we believe that pupils' independence should be promoted wherever possible. Pupils on the autistic spectrum will have the opportunity to work in small groups.

### **Curriculum**

The curriculum is designed to be broad and balanced taking into account the social and academic needs of pupils on the autistic spectrum. The overall curriculum delivered at Dunclug PS includes opportunities to address the following:

- Communication
- Interaction

- Flexibility of thought
- Sensory sensitivity

### **Behaviour**

All staff and pupils are guided by the policy for the promotion of positive behaviour. Visual and communication strategies assist with the implementation of this policy. The impact of being on the autistic spectrum on pupils may cause high levels of frustration and/or anxiety resulting in challenging behaviour which presents as a barrier to their learning. At Dunclug PS we acknowledge that the following basic principles of good autism practice can reduce the incidence of such behaviour:

- Ensuring all staff have an awareness of the strengths and difficulties associated with autism.
- Providing a structured and consistent approach which enhances predictability.
- Supporting pupils' communication to try to reduce frustration.

### **Resources**

Here in Dunclug, we are trying to broaden our resources to help children with ASD.

Resources include:

- The Hub and a Cosy Den
- Disco Lights/calming lights
- Sensory Tubs
- Sensory Tables/bags
- Move and Sit Cushions
- Art Therapy
- Water beads
- Fine motor toys
- Tactile fidget toys
- Touch Boards
- Sensory Light Board
- Privacy boards
- iPads
- Two Calm Areas
- Reading Den
- Timers
- Earphones
- Music Station
- Weighted cushions
- Outdoor Classroom
- Playpark

The school and LSC also take on board advice provided by Educational Psychologists, ASD Service, RISE NI and any other external agency.

### **Partnership with Parents**

Parents are regarded as essential partners in helping their children to learn. A meeting to discuss their child's PLP is offered twice a year alongside an annual review (if Stage 5 on the SEN Register). Parents are welcomed to discuss concerns or strategies with class teacher, LSC or Principal at any time through an arranged appointment.

*Reviewed March 2020.*