**Belvue School**

**Policy for working with pupils diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Condition**

This Policy document sets out the aims, principles and strategies for the education of pupils with an Autistic Spectrum Condition at Belvue School. This policy should be read in conjunction with other school policies including Teaching and Learning, Communication, Behaviour and Flexibility of Thought.

**Introduction**

All pupils at Belvue School have a statement of need. All our pupils have a diagnosis of global learning disability and some of our pupils have an additional diagnosis of autistic spectrum condition (ASC), the primary characteristics of which are as follows: difficulties in non-verbal and verbal communication, difficulties in social understanding and social behaviour, and rigidity of thought, which may make change difficult and create problems with behaviour. Pupils with ASC may also experience unusual sensitivity to sound, touch and visual stimuli. In order to ensure that pupils with ASC are able to access the broad, balanced and relevant curriculum offered throughout the school these additional difficulties characteristic of pupils on the autistic spectrum are taken into account in all aspects of school life.

Reference to a ‘spectrum’ of difficulties is made because difficulties vary and there may be a change in the child’s needs over the years of his/her development. To ensure that this is fully acknowledged and addressed effectively during their time in school, the provision for our learners is reviewed at least termly through the learning conversation and review process.

**Rational**

In order to meet the needs of all pupils across the spectrum at Belvue School, we use an eclectic mix of established and researched approaches and interventions; drawing on best practice and continuously monitoring and evaluating their use. Our child centred approach, with emphasis on personalised learning, addresses the specific needs of each individual child.

At Belvue School pupils with an autistic spectrum condition are taught alongside their peers and are a member of both a class group and a vertical tutor group. At Belvue School pupils with ASC are included in every class throughout the school.

ASC affects communication, social understanding and flexibility in thinking and behaviour. This is known commonly as the ‘Triad of Impairment’ (Wing and Gould, 1979: Triad of Impairment). In addition to this there is also strong tendency towards repetitive behaviour all of which can result in unusual behaviours. The following outlines the main impairments found in our ASC learners:

1. Impairment in social relationships/skills/interactions:

* Lack of understanding of others people’s feelings and emotions
* inability to interpret other people’s facial expressions and body language
* limited ability to act appropriately in social situations and consequently learners have difficulties in forming meaningful friendships

2. Impaired imagination – the inability to imagine things which have not already been experienced

* Difficulty coping with new or different situations therefore creating and experiencing fear
* Difficulty in coping with changes in routine which can produce feelings of fear and disorientation as learner are unable to imagine an alternative order of events – See guidance on ‘flexibility of thought’
* Difficulty in realising or comprehending that other people’s mental state is different to their own, as a consequence they may not appreciate that other people have their own thoughts, plans and ideas.
* Learners with ASC may also experience difficulties with generalisation

3. Communication and Language – learners with ASC may have trouble with expressing themselves and understanding all levels of communication which may manifest as:

* A literal understanding of language therefore idioms such as ‘she is pulling my leg’, can be nonsensical.
* A lack of understanding of the importance of language in expressing feelings. Learners with ASC have the same range of emotions as their peers, but may not express them in a way that is easily understood as they may fail to realise that language is a way of doing this.
* Learners with ASC may talk to another person without taking any notice or interest in them.

In responding to this triad of impairment the emphasis is on communication, social interaction and the independence and emotional well-being of the individual pupil.

Due to our emphasis on personalised learning, class group teaching varies both environmentally and by the teaching approaches used, we believe that one size does not fit all, “personalised learning is all about shaping teaching around the different ways children learn” (DfES 2005). For example, although visual strategies are considered the learning style of choice for pupils with ASC this is not always the case. Staff seek to identify pupils’ preferred mode of learning as well as ways to ensure meaningful engagement in tasks. A ‘learning by doing’ approach is encouraged. Also different pupils require different levels of support. Some ASC children thrive when tasks are modelled in 1:1 situations whilst others work best when with one or more peers. Staff-pupil ratios are evaluated on an individual basis but are at least 2: 8.

Many pupils are easily distracted by what they hear, see, feel or smell. We recognise that pupils display varying degrees of tolerance to visual and auditory stimuli. At Belvue School we provide calm classroom environments, which also have comfortable seating areas where pupils may take themselves when their levels of anxiety become raised. Each classroom also has a designated work station which faces away from visual or auditory distractions and provides an individualised learning area for **some** activities.

**Curriculum**

The school is committed to accessing the National Curriculum for all pupils, particularly in terms of breadth and richness. The school does, however, recognise that pupils on the autistic spectrum have additional difficulties which necessitate the adaption of the courses of study prescribed in the National Curriculum. This may mean a greater emphasis on certain areas of need for these children e.g. communication, social skills development and sexual health support.

Therefore, pupils access a full differentiated curriculum delivered in a way that addresses the triad of impairment. Underpinning all teaching and learning is an emphasis on the development of independence, social interaction, social understanding and social communication. Lessons are planned to facilitate development in these areas but specific teaching, for example in social skills, life skills and sensory desensitization are also included. We provide many ‘real life’ opportunities, for example, educational visits are used to help reduce rigidity and develop appropriate social skills.

We develop skills through our creative and diverse curriculum, which follows a different theme each half term. The curriculum is delivered through a sensory, visual and practical approach. Within our fully inclusive approach pupils are encouraged to be involved in a range of experiences to support their understanding of new concepts and skills.

**Approaches and Interventions**

At Belvue School we use a child-centred approach which addresses the specific needs of the individual child. Different children may need a different 'mix' of the best known approaches to meet their needs, 'in terms of an ethical approach to a child, an eclectic mix may offer the best opportunity'. R Jordan (2001).

We have a range of effective strategies that take account of the pupils difficulties and seek to minimise them, enabling the pupil to feel calm and focused, thus more able to learn.

**Our eclectic approach includes:**

1. The development of Language and communication
2. A range of Therapy interventions
3. TEACCH
4. Behavioural Approaches
5. Social Scripts and Stories
6. Physical activity
7. Sensory approach

**1.The development of language and communication**

The development of speech and language is priority at Belvue School and therefore we facilitate this by developing staff skills as well as employing a communication champion and a speech and language therapist. See school policy on communication

**Parent support**

We offer workshops and consultations with the speech and language therapist and communication champion to support parents with developing communication at home

**2. We have a range of practitioners who provide Therapeutic interventions to support communication and behaviour:**

Occupational Therapist

Educational Therapist

Specialist Nurse for LD

Music Therapist

Clinical Psychologist

School counsellor

All these therapists are employed to work with groups and individual children to develop their self-esteem, social, emotional and communication skills. They also provide advice to parents and teachers within their specialist area.

**3. TEACCH** **(Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication Handicapped Children)**

The key principles of TEACCH e.g. structure and visual information are practised throughout the school to enable pupils to know what they are doing next, when it will be finished and what will happen when it is finished. Individual and class timetables are used to support pupils. Aspects of this approach involve the use of minimum distraction work areas which have minimal visual or auditory distractions, where pupils can systematically work on skills. Implementation of TEACCH varies across the school according to the needs of classes or individuals. Some classrooms are clearly organised along TEACCH principles with individual timetables and workstations. In other classes, individuals may use timetables for some elements of their learning e.g. making choices during unstructured times, specific transitions

**4.Behavioural Approaches**

Behaviour is a means of communication and we endeavour to understand what the child is aiming ‘to say’ through their behaviour. Specific strategies are used to reduce anxiety and promote feelings of well being. An applied behaviour analysis approach helps to modify unwanted behaviours and promote more appropriate ones. This stimulus – response – reward programme, which involves the use of strong motivators ensure the child learns basic work behaviour e.g. sitting on a chair. The same principles are used when dealing with behavioural issues. We consistently aim to reinforce positive behaviour and to reinforce positive responses. Some pupils have individual behavioural plans that are regularly reviewed and updated. All teachers and teaching assistants are trained in the principles and skills of positive handling.

**5.Physical Activity**

Physical activity is encouraged within structured PE lessons as well as the opportunity to have regular play and exercise sessions. These physical activities reflect elements of Higashi Daily Life Therapy.

**6.Social Scripts and Stories**

These aim to reduce anxiety in unfamiliar situations or when preparing for a certain event. They also inform the child about social expectations and the benefits of conforming to these, see communication policy.

**7.Sensory Approach**

A sensory approach is used to engage pupils in their learning and the Occupational Therapists support staff with sensory modulation within the classroom providing sensory diets for young people as appropriate.

**Assessment**

All pupils are comprehensively assessed using PIVAT’s on entry to school. Challenging, but realistic targets are set with pupils’ learning styles and pace of learning in mind. Pupil progress is tracked and recorded each term and assessment outcomes are reported at Annual Review meetings. IEP targets are set each term and may be ASD specific. These aim to reduce barriers to learning.

**Continuity of Approach**

We recognise the importance of generalising the skills that pupils learn both across school and within a range of settings. Class teachers regularly liaise with multi-disciplinary teams, respite workers, parents and carers to ensure continuity of approaches in and out of school.

**Training**

Staff are trained in autism specific practices and interventions such TEACCH. All staff have attended internal training on autism-awareness and good practice. School staff are kept up to date with current research relating to the education and well-being of pupils with an autistic spectrum condition.

**We have high but realistic expectations for all our pupils. We endeavour to provide the very best learning experiences through a personalised approach. To achieve this, our provision for pupils on the autistic spectrum is continuously monitored, evaluated and adapted as part of the self-evaluation process.**

**APPENDIX 1**

**Guidance on Flexibility of Thought**

**What is Flexibility of Thought?**

People with ASC may have an impaired ability to use imagination to problem solve and predict outcomes on day to day basis. Difficulties link to the ability to reflect back on ones own thinking about experiences not already encountered. This includes the ability to engage in pretend play, role play and take part in curriculum activities that involve abstract thinking and the use of imagination. The effect this has on a learner with ASC is that they have difficulty predicting what could happen next or in determining what is expected. This may lead to a learner becoming reliant on establishing routines and rituals to secure a familiar outcome in environments that are constantly changing.

Learners with ASC at Belvue may display this impairment in the following ways:

The young person;

* Cannot easily make sense of sequences and events
* May become distressed if a familiar routine changes
* Often engages in stereotypical body movements
* May impose routines on others
* Often resists new experiences e.g. trying difficult foods
* Finds it hard to work out what other people re going to do and cannot make sense why they do things – unable to take someone else’s perspective
* Will only develop imaginative play slowly if at all
* Often pays particular attention to unusual details
* Has poor self-organisational skills and difficulties with structuring personal time productively
* Relies on rituals and set procedures, has a desire to preserve sameness and a strong resistance to change
* Has difficulty generalising skills into different settings
* Has a limited repertoire of interests and activities that may be pursued to

obsessional levels

* Has very poor levels of incidental learning and limited imitation skills
* Lacks imagination and original thought. Learners may enact scenes from cartoons, films, books etc.

At Belvue School we aim to compensate for this impairment by teaching skills which will enable learners to problem solve, plan and cope with change. It is important to ensure learners have the opportunities to generalise these skills across a variety of settings using a diversity of techniques including practical activities, role play, social skills groups, modelling and play opportunities. It will also be addressed through educational trips, after school clubs, lunchtime and break time activities and other opportunities within curriculum areas.

**Provision for the development of Flexibility of Thought**

* Newly appointed staff have a thorough induction which includes knowledge of the Triad of Impairments and how the impairment of the third part of the triad impacts on a learners flexibility and imagination. Information is given to assist understanding of the impact of the rigid thinking patterns of learners with ASC.
* Use of *TEACCH* strategies such as structure of the environment and visual schedules, written lists and individual school diaries facilitate learner’s understanding of events, allow for introduction of change and encourage the development of flexibility. Learners are prepared in advance for any ‘surprises’ on their timetables to prepare learners for change.
* Individualbehaviour management programmes highlight areas of inflexibility for individual learners and identify and set appropriate targets for managing the behaviour.
* Staff are trained in the use of *Social Stories* and they are used to address the needs of learners who have difficulties in particular areas. For example, ‘theory of mind’ describes the difficulty autistic individuals have in assuming the perspective of another person. This can be addressed by the Social Story technique to help individuals ‘read’ and understand situations and to also help them answer the ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘where’ and ‘why’ of social settings.
* All learners have a weekly targets and a termly individual educational plan (IEP’s) that contribute to the promotion of the development of Flexibility of Thought.
* The use of planned changes and strategies such as ‘sabotage’ are used to enable children to cope in controlled situations, which can then be generalised into other settings.
* There are planned opportunities for learners to develop skills in making choices, sequencing, managing change, decision making and problem solving throughout the curriculum and school day.
* The special interests of learners are built into individual programmes, job routines or as rewards as part of daily timetables.
* Identified learners have input from a fully qualified Music Therapist and this encourages the development of *shared attention.* It also helps the pupil to see what they are doing in a new way [mirroring] by reflecting back what they are doing through music.
* Learners attend regular educational trips linked to curricular topics. Visual timetables help learners manage any problems linked to change and detailed risk assessments indicate any difficulties enabling learners to take part safely in these opportunities.
* The school has a thriving after school and lunchtime programme which gives learners extra-curricular opportunities to develop flexibility of thought through sport, role play, creativity and provides opportunities for learners to explore emotions.
* Learners have a range of experiences throughout the school week of working in different areas across the school and within a mixed Vertical Tutor group. This variance contributes to their ability to develop skills in managing change across a range of settings.
* Communication Passports are written for learners to aid transition to Belvue School and between classes and settings as required.
* ASC assessments are carried out by the neurodevelopmental team at Ealing Services for Children with Disability who provide information on pupil’s Flexibility of Thought and Imagination. This information is used to develop an individual programme of support for the young person and is reviewed as part of the termly learning conversation.

**Guidance Statement and Recording of Progress**

* This guidance ensures that learners with Autistic Spectrum Condition have maximum access to the curriculum, that they raise their achievement and increase their interaction with others. It focuses on removing barriers and promoting learners’ opportunities for learning in an inclusive environment within and outside school.
* Learners at Belvue are provided with a wide range of opportunities to develop their flexibility of thought and imagination.
* At Belvue School we acknowledge the importance of addressing this impairment within the school’s curriculum and within all lessons, however it is not only confined to timetabled sessions but addressed across the whole school day including eating at lunch-time.
* Learner’s targets in this area are addressed in the IEP and across the school day and are summarised within the Annual Review Report.

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