**SAINT JOHN’S PS**

**AUTISM POLICY**

**Reviewed: Autumn 2019**

**Person Responsible: SENCO**

This Policy should be read in conjunction with the Policy for Special Educational Needs and the Pastoral Care Policy.

**Introduction**

In St. John’s we welcome and support pupils of all abilities and needs. Some of our pupils have needs which are physical or learning related, or indeed both. Some of our pupils have a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and here is some information on the primary characteristics as we understand them currently:

They are described as a ‘triad of impairments’:

* Difficulties with social communication
* Difficulties with social interaction
* Difficulties with social imagination

These difficulties might be manifested as…

* Difficulties in non-verbal and verbal communication
* Social understanding and social behaviour
* Thinking and behaving flexibly (situation dependant)
* Sensory perception and responses
* Unusual sensitivity to sound, touch and visual stimuli

The condition is referred to as a spectrum and there can be a change in the child’s needs over the years of his/her development and the difficulties vary greatly.

This policy document sets out the school’s aims, principles and strategies for the education of pupils with ASD and will guide practice for all staff.

As a Nurturing school, we recognise the significance of emotional well-being in the overall development of our pupils.  Pupils with ASD will learn in inclusive and supportive classroom environments in order to improve their self-esteem, resilience and emotional well-being.  They will also be supported in establishing positive relationships, engaging in predictable and consistent routines and interactions and developing effective strategies to deal with transitions.

**Rationale**

In order to ensure that pupils with ASD are able to access a broad and balanced curriculum, we need to take into account the additional characteristics and difficulties for pupils on the spectrum.

Their needs should be taken into account in all aspects of school life, including the school environment and grounds, the climate for learning, planning, teaching, learning objectives, and staff development.

**Aims**

The following key principles underpin our practice to enable us to provide the best possible education for pupils with ASD

* Knowledge and understanding of ASD throughout the school
* Knowledge, understanding and implementation of established interventions and approaches guided by the SEN Resource File, professional dialogue and information provided by EANI(NE) and by families.
* Knowledge and understanding of general and specific behaviours and behaviour management approaches.
* Clear communication at class and key stage transition.
* Provision is continuously monitored and evaluated as part of the professional dialogue between class teachers, assigned and general assistants, SENCO and Principal.
* Particular issues can be raised at Key Stage meetings.

**Equality and Inclusion**

Pupils with ASD will be included with class teaching where and when it best meets the needs of that child. On occasion it may be necessary to withdraw the child from some activities or sessions in the child’s own best interests and according to the decision of the class teacher guided by the assistant where assigned.

This is to ensure equal provision which may not always be the SAME provision.

**Sensory Issues**

Adjustments may be made to participation in the lunch arrangements or when there are whole school events like assemblies or shows.

**Environment**

Many pupils with ASD have sensory difficulties which can result in unusual or uncomfortable perception of sound, sense, touch, sight, smell, taste, light and colour. This means that many children are unable to focus on teaching and learning activities and can be distracted by noise and visual or other stimuli. This can have a profound affect on their ability to learn and can impact behaviour when sensory input causes extreme discomfort or pain. Pupils with ASD also have difficulties with flexibility and require clear visual support to understand routines and expectations. Therefore we try to reduce environmental anxiety and distress by the following:

* Providing an environment which is calm, distraction free and has a low level of visual or auditory stimulus. (An example is the Wonder Room adjacent to the Library, or Quiet Room)
* Providing pupils with a high degree of visual and physical structure.
* Providing pupils with a means of requesting withdrawal to a quiet or ‘chill-out’ area (safe-space when their levels of anxiety become raised. (An example of this might be to use a ‘Break Card’ to exit the classroom to the cloakroom just outside the door or to use the sensory aspects of the Wonder Room)

**Approaches and Interventions**

In St. John’s we use a mix of established and researched approaches and interventions which are very much tailored to the needs of the individual and in consultation with the EANI(NE) ASD Service and with families. We draw on best practice and advice or guidance from expert professionals and make adjustments where appropriate.

Examples of strategies may include:

* Choice Board
* First/ Then
* PECS
* Visual Timetable
* Individual Timetable
* Individual rewards
* Fidget toys

**Assessment**

Pupils with ASD will undergo assessments as part of the learning cycle along with their peers where such tools match the pupils’ needs and capabilities.

In some cases much of the assessment conducted will consist of adult observations which will feed into communication between teachers, assistants and families as well as the Annual Review for those at Stage 5 of the Code of Practice.

**Curriculum**

Pupils with ASD, along with their peers will have teaching and learning which encourages independence, social interaction, social understanding and social communication. The balance of the curriculum will be adapted to ensure sufficient attention to these areas is given where needed.

Such learning sessions may well include social skills, life skills, and sensory desensitization and will often centre on ‘real-life’ situations and will include swimming, trips, road safety etc.

**Behaviour**

Behaviour is often a means of communication and we endeavour to understand the function behind the behaviour. Specific strategies are used to reduce anxiety and to promote feelings of well-being and to modify unwanted behaviours and to promote more appropriate ones.

Some pupils will have individual behaviour plans and these will be reviewed and updated if and when required.

Risk assessments will be conducted where appropriate and according to guidance from EANI(NE) specific training.

**Continuity of Approach**

Class teachers will liaise with multi-disciplinary teams from external agencies, with families and the SENCO to promote continuity of approach for the pupil.

**Staff Development**

ASD courses are provided by EANI (NE) usually at the start of the academic year and provision is made for teachers and assistants to avail of this.

Staff development also takes place informally when there is professional dialogue between practitioners and this sharing of good practice is to be encouraged.