



# Whole School Autism Policy

October 2024



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## **1.0 Mission Statement**

High quality education changes the world, one child at a time.

We prepare our students for life in a diverse world by intentionally integrating students of all abilities, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, from all faiths and none.

We provide a caring and inclusive environment to help our students achieve excellence within a culture of acceptance and understanding.



## 2.0 Rationale

This policy has been written to supplement the school's SEN policy and it reflects the large number of pupils in Integrated College Glengormley with a diagnosis of ASD. The support outlined also aims to support those pupils who present with social and communication difficulties.

Autism is a pervasive, developmental disorder that affects how someone views every aspect of the world around them. It can make communication with others very complex and impacts greatly on how a pupil learns.

Pupils with ASD will have differences in the following core areas:

- Social Communication
- Social Imagination
- Sensory processing



## 2.0 Rationale continued...

Due to these difficulties, pupils with ASD will often experience high levels of anxiety during the school day. Coping with the school environment during adolescence can cause anxiety to heighten greatly and this can sometimes present as challenging behaviour. There are a number of supports in place in school outlined in this policy which can help reduce anxiety to a more manageable level.

Pupils with ASD may also experience difficulties in one or more of the following areas in school:

- Emotional Regulation
- Organisational skills
- Completion of homework
- Study and revision skills
- Examinations
- Focus and attention
- Unusual eating, drinking and toileting patterns



## 3.0 Whole School Approaches

### 1. Aims

- To meet the individual needs of all pupils who have a diagnosis of Autism and take into account any associated difficulties and comorbidities.
- To ensure high quality Autism provision is in place and that this is reflected in all aspects of school life in ICG.
- To continue to maintain positive partnerships with parents.
- To address staff training needs and ensure staff have access to any relevant training which will develop their knowledge and understanding of ASD.
- To avail of the ASC Resource base for advice and support on individual pupils to help meet needs and support teachers and Teaching Assistants (TAs).
- To continue to adopt a multi-agency approach where applicable and collaborate with other key professionals as and when required.



## **3.0 Whole School Approaches continued...**

### **2. Inclusive Practice**

ICG is committed to promoting inclusion and appreciating the differing learning, social and personal needs of pupils with Autism. This ensures that pupils have full access to the NI Curriculum with modifications when necessary. This may involve adaptations to the school and classroom environment, varying teaching approaches and supports and interventions that provide concrete strategies to help support the pupil with ASD.

Whole school inclusive practice involves the following principles:

- Pupil Engagement (voice of the pupil)
- Parental Engagement
- Identification and Assessment of Needs
- Collaboration with educational and health professionals
- Support and Interventions
- Evidence-based outcomes



## 3.0 Whole School Approach continued...

### 3. Continuing Professional Development

“It is the findings of the Task Group (2002) that those who work with children with ASD need to have a sound knowledge of the nature of Autism and of the influence of the Autism upon the individual child.”

#### Task Group Report 2002

Teaching and support staff in ICG are committed to completing and updating their professional development in Autism. Staff have completed Tier 1 and Tier 2 ‘ASD Awareness Training’ delivered by the Autism Advisory and Intervention Service (EA). The SEN Department are proactive in promoting further relevant training to staff.

Staff have undertaken training provided by Middletown Centre for Autism as part of a whole school programme in 2020. These sessions were available to parents, teachers and support staff and included the following areas:

- Learning Styles and Visual Supports
- Anxiety and Autism
- Sensory Processing and Autism
- Make and Take (Visual Resources)
- Emotional Regulation

The SENCo and teachers from the Autism Specific Classes regularly undertake further specialised training provided by Middletown and disseminate this to relevant staff.





## **3.0 Whole School Approach continued...**

### **4. Teaching and Learning**

Building positive relationships between teachers and pupils is a core value in ICG. Teachers recognise how crucial this is for a pupil with Autism and always strive to show patience, understanding and often going above and beyond to develop a relationship of trust. Many of the challenges for pupils with ASD can be lessened by staff who have developed a good mentoring relationship with them. If the pupil can identify someone in the school environment who they can approach for support, then anxiety can be reduced.

Teachers strive to provide a calm learning environment that offers the routine and structure that is preferred by a pupil with ASD. Attention is paid to seating plans, personal working space between pupils and sensory distractions e.g. noise levels.

Classrooms should provide an age-appropriate level of visual support that includes clear and concise expectations and instructions.

A wide range of teaching methods are used in lessons to engage pupils and to provide opportunities for success. Through their training, staff understand the need to break work down into manageable chunks when necessary and allow additional time for the completion of activities. Teaching Assistants also support with this to help ensure pupils can access all learning opportunities.



## 3.0 Whole School Approach continued...

### 5. Personal Learning Plan (PLP)

All pupils with a diagnosis of Autism will be on our medical needs register which is disseminated to all staff. Teachers will put in place reasonable adjustments in the classroom to help overcome any barriers these young people might have to their learning. Those pupils identified as not making progress, despite reasonable adjustments will be placed on the Code of Practice and the SEN register. They may need to be supported by a **Personal Learning Plan** which will detail the additional support being put in place. This should take account of the social needs of the young person with ASD. Targets are often social and related to improving independence and organisational skills.

The PLP should be a **working document** which lists targets for the pupil.

- Targets can be social and related to improving their independence or organisational skills.
- Keep the targets specific, measurable and set a time limit.
- Evaluate and review regularly.
- Remember, the PLP should be informative, reflect the child's needs and be easy to use.
- The PLP should include information on the pupil's strengths and weaknesses and should list any input from other agencies.

Targets are reviewed at least twice per year, more often if necessary, and **ALL** teachers have a responsibility to monitor and evaluate these.

The SENCo, Form Tutor & Head of Year should be aware of the specific difficulties experienced by the individual pupil. This information should be circulated to the pupil's teachers each year and is in the form of a Pupil Profile included in Appendix 1 section of this document.



## **3.0 Whole School Approach continued...**

### **6. Partnership with Parents**

School always encourages open communication with parents to deal with any issues that may arise. The SENCo, Form Tutor, Head of Year or the subject teacher can always be contacted about any concerns. Parents should always be encouraged to share information about their child so that the correct support can be put in place.

It is good practice at Key Stage 3 to maintain a Home/School communication diary to communicate additional information that may not already be recorded in the Homework Planner. This includes positives about the school day and helps to reinforce homework tasks and can be completed by a TA, if available.

At Key Stage 4, it is more age appropriate to for staff to communicate with parents via telephone or email.



## 4.0 ASD Specific Approaches

### 1. Anxiety Management

High levels of anxiety is a characteristic of Autism. Staff should consider the following questions to help assess what the causes may be:

1. Identify any triggers in school that could have heightened anxiety.
2. Are there any changes to the pupil's normal routine at school **OR** at home that could be triggering an increase in anxiety?
3. Are there new levels of isolation/withdrawal from situations different to the norm which could be causing distress?
4. What are peer relationships like at present?
5. Is the pupil experiencing any organisational difficulties?
6. Does the pupil have any sensory difficulties? How are they coping with the physical environment of the school/classroom?
7. Is the pupil known to CAMHS for assessment and/or treatment of high anxiety?
8. What strategies have been tried to date in school and how effective have they been in managing the pupil's anxiety?
9. If there is a teaching assistant available, what strategies have they employed so far to help reduce anxiety?



## **4.0 ASD Specific Approaches continued...**

Strategies are in place to help pupils manage their anxiety in school. Pupils can access the following support:

- Time-out pass
- Early-leave pass for class to avoid corridors,
- Late pass for mornings
- Reduced timetable (to be agreed with Pastoral Vice Principal)
- Access to the Re-Charge room (sensory space)
- Talking to a key adult
- Reduced day (short term measure)
- School's Counselling Service



## 4.0 ASD Specific Approaches continued...

### 2. Organisational Difficulties and Homework

Poor executive functioning often means pupils with ASD will struggle to be organised for school, particularly with the demands of the post primary environment. This is directly related to their diagnosis.

- It is important that the parents of our children are directly involved in ensuring they have successfully packed the correct books for the next day. Supplying parents with a copy of the timetable is helpful.
- Having a colour coded system is advisable. Colour-coded timetables that match their books/files can be useful, especially for Year 8 pupils. These appeal to the pupil's visual strengths, help give a clear structure to their school day and help pupils to keep their classwork organised.
- Written instructions for the pupil if they need help during the school day. These instructions should outline where the pupil should go and who they should see if they have a problem. These instructions should be put inside their diary.
- Presentation and organisation of work is usually a problem for the pupil with ASD. This can sometimes be addressed by the use of a laptop or ipad.
- Planning how to go about a task can also be challenging for a pupils with ASD. It is important to break tasks down into visual steps either on a whiteboard or laminated A4 page which can then be erased once completed. If there is a TA available, they should support the class teacher with this.



## 4.0 ASD Specific Approaches continued...

It can often take a pupil with ASD an inordinate amount of time to complete homework assignments. Staff should consider the following:

- Allow time at the beginning/end of class for the pupil to record their homework in their planner.
- If a TA is available, ensure they help maintain the planner. If not, Form Tutors should check planners daily.
- Form Tutors could keep a Homework schedule for the whole class to promote good organisational skills for everyone.
- Set a time limit for homework tasks. Whatever is completed within that time will be acceptable.
- Reduce the amount of homework e.g. if 5 Maths questions is enough to show understanding then don't insist on 20 examples being completed.

### **3. Study and Revision Skills**

Study and revision skills are a huge problem for pupils with ASD and this is related to their difficulties with executive functioning.

- Making a revision timetable with the pupil is important. Examples of revision timetables should be provided and it is important to inform parents of how they can work in school during periods of study leave.
- A visual system of highlighting important facts in yellow, quotes in red, etc can help when it comes to revision. Mind Maps should be used for some students to help them retain information for exams.
- When a pupil with ASD is given an assignment/project work, it is important to provide the pupil with detailed guidelines for such a task.
- Parents should be informed about project work and deadlines. Pupils with ASD rarely feel it is important to inform parents of these. Parental input in this area can be the difference between work being handed in on time or not.



## **4.0 ASD Specific Approaches continued...**

### **4. Exams**

Some pupils may qualify for exam concessions. It is important that these arrangements have been common practice for the pupil and reflect their normal way of working. There also needs to be a clear record of evidence of need. Where possible, access arrangements which enable a young person to work independently are encouraged e.g. using a computer reader instead of a reader. This also helps prepare for further education. Examples of other exam access arrangements that pupils may require include the following:

- Scribe
- Reader
- Extra time
- Use of laptop
- Separate room

The evidence of need required by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ), is based on teachers' observations. Evidence must be collated by the SENCo before the school applies to JCQ for access arrangements. The SENCo stores the evidence gathered for each pupil and is required to produce this evidence for the JCQ Inspector. The SENCo is also the school's designated qualified assessor and all pupils who receive access arrangements must have been formally assessed by her before an online application is made. Teaching staff support the SENCo in identifying, determining and implementing appropriate access arrangements.





## 4.0 ASD Specific Approaches continued...

### 5. Social Approaches

Adolescence is a difficult time for pupils with ASD. Pupils with ASD will at some stage have difficulty appreciating the thoughts and feelings of others (Theory of Mind) which can result in unsuccessful attempts at friendship and becoming part of a group. This can cause them to become isolated in school.

Pupils with ASD are most vulnerable at unstructured times of the school day when fewer adults are around e.g. at break / lunch time, between classes, in changing rooms and travelling to and from school. The most successful intervention is to provide children with safe areas during unstructured times of the school day.

The ASC classrooms are open to providing this safe space at break and lunch. Pupils have the opportunity to meet others with common interests, play games or sit quietly and have their break and lunch.

Pupils with ASD are also encouraged to join a Club in school which may be in relation to their special interest.

Teaching assistants are also used during this time to help foster social opportunities as they have a good understanding of class dynamics and will be able to identify reliable pupils to encourage engagement with. This helps to increase the amount of positive social interactions a pupil with ASD has in the school day.

The support of an additional adult is invaluable for pupils with ASD. Please refer to guidance in Appendix 2 which outlines responsibilities for a TA when supporting pupils with ASD.



# APPENDIX 1



## Pupil Profile

**Pupil:**

**DOB:**

**Date Completed:**

Is the pupil aware of their diagnosis/es? Y N

Pupil Interests

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Strengths and skills

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How does Autism present for this pupil?

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### Key areas of concern

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### Triggers for anxiety/stress

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### Strategies currently working

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### Do's/Don'ts for managing behaviour

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### Any other relevant information

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