



Spring Common Academy



Autism Handbook

A guide to good practice



Also available to download on the school's website:

www.springcommon.cambs.sch.uk

Autism Handbook

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Chapter One

THE NATURE of AUTISM

Autism is a lifelong condition, which has its origins before birth. It is a very complex condition which presents very differently from person to person. For this reason at Spring Common School we use the term Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC) to describe the wide range of 'autisms' within the diagnostic category. An eminent researcher in the field, Simon Baron-Cohen, writes:

The official terminology is to use the acronym ASD, for autism spectrum disorder. I prefer the acronym ASC, since individuals in the high-functioning subgroup are certainly different – they think differently and perceive differently – but it is arguable whether these differences should be seen as a disorder.

(Baron-Cohen, 2008, p14)

Currently ASC are diagnosed behaviourally. This means that the medical professionals involved in the diagnosis will base their judgement on clinical interviews with parents and carers and/or direct observation of the child. Autism is usually diagnosed by a paediatrician, often working with a speech and language therapist and a psychologist as part of a multi-disciplinary team. As yet there is no test to identify autism through biological markers, such as gene variants or specific proteins in the blood.

Autism is diagnosed when atypical patterns of behaviour are observed in three key areas of development:

ONE

Social understanding, social interaction and relating to others

People with ASC may from infancy appear quite disinterested in others. They may appear lost in their own world and not make eye contact with others. As a consequence, they may not develop the skills of joint attention and reciprocal interaction that are so important in typical child development. As they grow older, children and young people with ASC often struggle to understand the motivations of others and the social rules that organise society. Sometimes, people with ASC are described as lacking 'theory of mind': the ability to put themselves into the position of others and understand their perspective. People with ASC may struggle to pick up the subtle social cues that help us to manage relationships, such as noticing when someone is embarrassed, trying to redirect a conversation onto a new topic or end a conversation politely.

TWO

Communication, both verbal and non-verbal

Many children with ASC are late to speak or may not develop spoken language at all. In some cases where language develops later, this may be linked to the lack of reciprocal interaction with primary care givers that is so important in the development of language for most children. When language comprehension does develop, it is often unusually hard for children with ASC to understand non-literal forms of language, such as idioms and other figures of speech. Many people with ASC find themselves more adept at processing visual information than auditory information. Systems such as Makaton and symbol usage, which support communication through visual cues, are therefore very helpful to people with ASC.

THREE

Restricted activity patterns and flexible thinking

Children with ASC often display strong interests in particular toys and spend long periods of time in repetitive play structures. For example, lining up sets of toy cars over and over again or repeatedly spinning the blades of a circular fan. Children and young people with ASC may be very resistant to having these play sequences interrupted, perhaps because they provide order and predictability in an uncertain world. A lack of flexible thinking skills means that it is usually easiest for children with ASC to manage their interactions with the world when events follow predictable routines and structures; unexpected changes may be very hard to understand and lead to emotional and behavioural upset. It is common for people with ASC to require longer to process information, particularly if this involves change from familiar routines or the information is delivered by auditory means.

+ PLUS

Sensory Sensitivities

Many people with ASC have difficulties in a fourth area: sensory sensitivity. They may be unusually sensitive to the way things feel, for example, finding the texture of certain clothing materials intolerable to the point of painfulness. Unusual levels of sensitivity to sounds, smells and visual stimuli are the daily experience of people with ASC. They may be hypersensitive and experience aspects of the daily sensory diet that we all live through as overwhelming. They may simultaneously be hyposensitive to other stimuli and not notice things that seem very apparent to most neurotypical people. ('Neurotypicals' is the term used by many people with ASC to describe those who do not have a diagnosis of the condition). Each person with Autism has their own sensory profile and what may overwhelm one person may have no adverse impact on another.

When I was little, loud noises were also a problem, often feeling like a dentist's drill hitting a nerve. They actually caused pain. I was scared to death of balloons popping, because the sound was like an explosion in my ear. Minor noises that most people can tune out drove me to distraction.

(Grandin, 2006, p63)

Chapter Two

THE NATIONAL AUTISTIC SOCIETY ***SPELL*** FRAMEWORK

The approaches used at Spring Common School draw on the understanding of autism described above. We also subscribe to the National Autistic Society (NAS) SPELL framework, which is designed to provide a mnemonic of five key areas of support that evidence shows are effective in scaffolding support for learning for children and young people with ASC.

SPELL is an acronym for:

S

Structure:

Structure is fundamental in supporting our students with ASC to make sense of what can be a very confusing and potentially overwhelming world. Structure takes many different forms, including consistency of staffing, predictability of routines, a physical environment that can be relied upon not change unexpectedly and adapted teaching techniques that pay attention to individual learning styles.

P

Positive attitudes and expectations:

At Spring Common we have robust systems for monitoring the progress of our students in their academic and social development. We have high expectations of all of our students based on their current functioning and rates of progress in the past. We are a learning environment that continually evaluates new methodologies and implements those where we are able to evidence benefits for our students.

E**Empathy:**

Through careful observation of our young people, respectful discussions about them and liaison with parents and carers we seek to understand the experience of our students better and adapt ourselves to meet their needs.

L**Low arousal:**

At Spring Common we are fortunate in having a range of therapeutic base rooms and specialist classrooms in which we can provide our students with an environment that matches their sensory needs. We understand that for many young people with ASC this means a lower stimulation environment than is ideal for other learners. Many classrooms are zoned to provide lower stimulation areas for children with ASC. Our ASC bases in the upper and lower schools are designed to be distraction and clutter free environments conducive to learning for children with ASC who may, at times, find their class environment over-stimulating.

L**Links:**

We value enormously our links with parents, recognising that close communication is vital in ensuring consistency of approach for and understanding the daily experience of a young person who may not be able to communicate verbally. We are fortunate at Spring Common in having very close relationships with health and education support professionals. We try to make best use of these professionals in problem solving around individual pupil programmes as well as supporting the professional development of our staff.

Chapter Three

SUPPORTING AUTISM AT SPRING COMMON ACADEMY

STAFFING

The particular needs of children with ASC are recognised in the Spring Common staffing structure. There is a team of specialist staff whose role is to support the delivery of an effective educational experience to all children with ASC in the school. In fulfilling this role they may take on a wide range of roles, including the following:

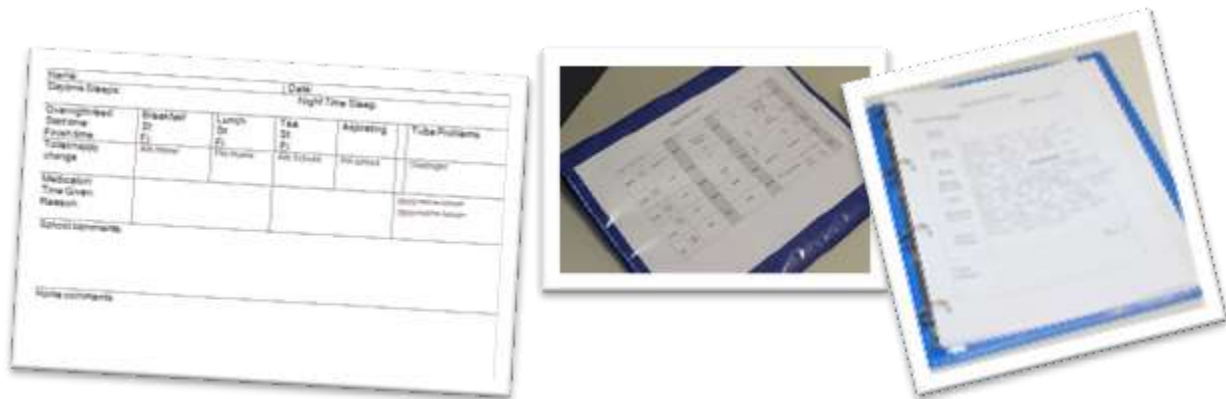
- ❖ direct teaching (usually in the ASC base rooms)
- ❖ maintaining links with parents
- ❖ advice on programme planning
- ❖ liaison with external professionals
- ❖ providing training to other staff
- ❖ support with the preparation of resources

All members of the school community are encouraged to approach members of the autism team to discuss any concerns they may have regarding the social or educational development of students with ASC.

HOME/SCHOOL LIAISON

At Spring Common we regard a close working relationship between home and school as vital for all of our students. For our students who have communication difficulties, including our young people with ASC, this is particularly important. Our role is more than simply the delivery of a curriculum but as partners in the overall development of each child. We anticipate that each teacher will take personal responsibility for:

- ❖ Ensuring that open daily communication is maintained with parents through the home / school book.
- ❖ Being sensitive to personal communication preferences of individual parents and accommodating these wherever possible.
- ❖ Fully consulting parents in relation to programme planning for their child both through formal and informal meetings such as annual reviews, multi-disciplinary meetings and parents' evenings.



For pupils who follow highly individualised programmes of work in the Upper School, the ASC team have daily recording sheets to note engagement and progress in relation to each aspect of the school day. These are completed by the adult leading each activity, with a summary comment being made by the class teacher or lead TA. These are kept within the child's blue folder, a resource folder for children with more complex ASC and communication difficulties that contains details of all their therapy plans and is kept with them at all times.

Many children with ASC experience difficulties that impact at home and school, for example with diet, toileting, sleeping and sensory sensitivities. Parents are welcome to contact the school to discuss these issues and seek support and where possible we will work jointly with them. The first point of contact for a parent should be the class teacher. Many issues can be dealt with at this level but class teachers should involve a senior manager in more complex issues such as those which may require home visits or a referral to an external professional, such as a health or social care worker. The relevant Assistant Head for Lower or Upper School or the Assistant Head for Autism provision would be the normal person to involve when a class teacher feels this may be required.

Chapter Four

THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

It is in the design of the classroom that the subtleties of producing an environment that suits the varying needs of Spring Common students and the ingenuity of the good teacher are revealed. For example, the needs of the child with ASC for a low stimulation environment may be quite different from the requirements of a child with PMLD. Similarly, each class grouping will contain a unique mix of students and so a formulaic classroom design will rarely be suitable. At Spring Common the teacher is expected to consider the space available and the needs of the students in the class to design an optimum learning environment.

Factors which need to be taken into consideration include:

Designated Areas:

- ❖ individual workstations
- ❖ paired and group work areas
- ❖ areas for 1 – 1 programmes
- ❖ whole group and social area
- ❖ quiet zone for withdrawal



In locating the different areas of the classroom, it is important to consider movement and transitions, to ensure that the workstations of children who are easily distracted are located away from routes into and out of the class, or to frequently used resources.

Furniture and resources:

- ❖ low level furniture and screens to divide areas
- ❖ tray stacks for children who may require this level of formality in their learning environment
- ❖ resources are accessible and are clearly labelled using photographs, Spring Common agreed symbols or text as appropriate
- ❖ resources are returned to their storage location at the end of a teaching session.
- ❖ surfaces are kept reasonably tidy and free from clutter
- ❖ schedules and timetables are easily accessible for reference
- ❖ once set up reorganisation of the room is kept to a minimum
- ❖ personal areas for the storage of coats, bags and equipment



In promoting the independence of students with ASC it is important to encourage them to take control of their own learning requirements wherever possible. This is more easily achieved in the context of a well-organised classroom where resources are located in a predictable and labelled location.

Classroom displays:

- ❖ relevant to current learning topics
- ❖ structured according to the needs of the students
- ❖ located to allow for low stimulation areas for children who are
- ❖ sensitive to excessive visual stimulation



In designing classroom displays the teacher may be forced to make compromises between some students whose attention is maximised by a highly visually stimulating display and others for whom the same display may be overwhelming and thereby inaccessible. Some teachers at Spring Common have managed this conflict by locating their most visually 'busy' displays in public areas such as corridors and keeping classroom displays more simple in structure.



Sensory needs:

- ❖ light levels (including maintenance of bulbs to avoid flickering)
- ❖ noise levels and systems to manage this for sensitive students
- ❖ materials chosen taking into account tactile defensiveness
- ❖ students who may be sensitive to 'unplanned touch' enabled to avoid this

Further consideration to sensory needs is given in Chapter 7 of this handbook. However, it is important to recognise the huge variability of sensory needs experienced by people with ASC and the need to plan individually for each student, drawing on support from the specialist skills of an Occupational Therapist (OT) as required.



Chapter Five

TEACHING and LEARNING

The normal intuitions of the good teacher will mislead when applied to autism. Teachers need to take a different approach to the process of teaching and learning to accommodate the particular style of autistic learners and they need to possess a specific kind of knowledge.

(Jordan, R. and Powell, S., 1995)

In these two sentences the challenge to the teacher of children with ASC is set. Many good teachers base their personal pedagogy around the quality of their interpersonal interaction, the motivational nature of their delivery and the richness of the resources they deploy to interest and engage students. These techniques will not necessarily mesh with the core difficulties of students with ASC. Interpersonal skills may not be helpful in engaging a young person with social communication difficulties. A motivational style of oral delivery will be unlikely to improve access for a child with a communication disorder. A rich multi-sensory array of resources may overwhelm someone with difficulties in flexible thinking and areas of sensory defensiveness. Rather, the teacher of students with ASC needs to bring to bear their knowledge of ASC and knowledge of the learning profile of the particular student on their broader knowledge of what characterises good teaching and learning. The ASC specific TEACCH approach is used at Spring Common and described in Appendix 1.



Commonly, students with ASC demonstrate the following characteristic learning and thinking styles:

- ❖ a relative strength in concrete thinking, for example, labelling shapes rather than describing their characteristics
- ❖ a preference for visually as opposed to orally presented materials, for example, written arithmetic rather than orally presented tasks
- ❖ a relatively slow speed of processing of orally presented materials leading to partial or incomplete understanding of a spoken instruction
- ❖ a relative strength in rote memory, for example, often displaying stronger reading skills through whole word learning than through phonics
- ❖ a strength in understanding visuospatial relationships, for example, puzzles.
- ❖ difficulties in abstract thinking, for example, inferring what a house in a tropical country might be like from knowledge of the climate
- ❖ difficulties in social cognition, for example, understanding what another person might think in a given situation
- ❖ difficulties in communication. Many people with ASC are reluctant writers; some ASC adults describe struggling to understand why they were expected to write down something they already knew
- ❖ unusual patterns of attention, for example, total absorption in a favourite activity and fleeting attention to something that is not preferred. The attentional pattern of a person with ASC has been described as being like a spotlight, focussed tightly on one particular area, as contrasted with the ambient lighting of a neurotypical attention pattern



Some implications of these characteristics for the teacher's practice are listed in the table below

<p>PLANNING</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Anticipate needing to make use of visual aids in the delivery of any taught component. ❖ Plan for visual scaffolding around tasks to aid comprehension of what is expected, for example, using sorting, matching and other categorisation tasks. ❖ Setting appropriately challenging targets for learning. ❖ Provide instructions in a clear step by step way, using visual as well as auditory instructions. ❖ Be clear about equipment and methodology involved in any task. ❖ Clarify what will constitute completion of the task.
<p>SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Identify those areas of the curriculum that learners with ASC will find particularly problematic such as estimation, empathy and figurative language. ❖ Link learning to student's existing knowledge or area of interest.
<p>CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Ensure that delivery is sufficiently clear and visual to avoid sensory overload. ❖ Use individualised approaches for engaging reticent students. ❖ Provide individualised and meaningful positive feedback for engagement and achievement, for example, choosing time after the completion of a set task. ❖ Encourage self evaluation of work to support self awareness. ❖ Make use of individualised strategies to support emotion regulation.
<p>ASSESSMENT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Within B squared mark components of a particular level that the student will never achieve on account of their core ASC difficulties. ❖ Ensure that assessment methodology maximises student's ability to demonstrate skills or knowledge. ❖ Make use of photographs and video to record achievement that has a transitory existence. ❖ Be clear about the difference in assessment between skills and understanding, for example, the ability to complete an arithmetic task but not apply it to a practical situation.

Chapter Six

COMMUNICATION

Young people with ASC generally find it easier to process visual information than spoken information. The spoken word is here for a moment and then it is gone; if it has not been understood we frequently follow it with more language, often delivered with greater emotional emphasis, raising arousal levels and reducing the likelihood of understanding. In contrast, visual information can be looked at for as long as is necessary to process the message.

All students at Spring Common who require one have a 'Communication Passport' that details their preferred communication methods and approaches. The advice of a Speech and Language Therapist is incorporated into the passport. The Communication Passport is updated in June each year ready for transition to new classes in July. All classroom staff need to be familiar with these passports so they can make use of the strategies and help students access any communication aids they require. Staff need to be proactive in requesting updates to the passport when a student has progressed with their communication.

At Spring Common a wide range of visual systems are used to support the communication of children with ASC, based on the child's age and developmental level. In general terms, visual supports to communication become more abstract as children become more confident communicators.

Examples of visual systems in use at the school include:

Objects of reference:

Also referred to as 'multi-sensory cues', these are objects that have a particular meaning assigned to them, reinforced through consistent use. The object stands for an activity rather than being part of the activity. For example a specific cup that is used for drinking to cue the student for snack time.



Photographs:

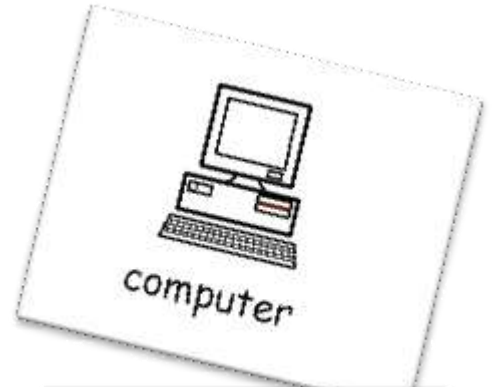
Photographs may be used to indicate an object, for example, a photograph of a pair of scissors on the drawer used to store them. As far as possible, the photograph

should represent the actual object.



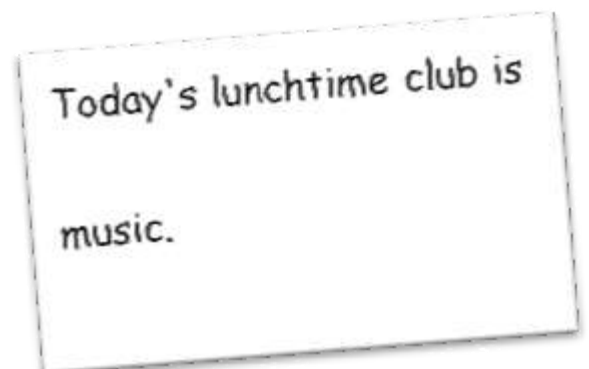
Symbols/Line Drawings:

'Symbols' are principally line drawings, offering a higher level of abstraction than photographs. At Spring Common we have an agreed dictionary of symbols, drawn primarily from the Widgit Symbol Set and accessed through Communicate: in Print 2 software. They are used widely across the school as labels



Text:

As a universally recognised form of representational communication the written word is the ultimate objective in the hierarchy of visual support.



Visual scaffolding supporting communication is used in labels around the school and for student's individual timetables. A visual timetable is essential in helping a young person with ASC to feel secure in the predictability of the environment they are working in. It is also an essential tool for helping young people to manage either planned or unexpected change (see Chapter 10 'Flexibility of Thought').

It is a common error to remove visual scaffolding too early, based on observations such as "he can follow what I say perfectly". There are various reasons why this is a dangerous conclusion. Young people may not actually be following what is said but completing routine actions that are done regularly or imitating others. For example, a child may correctly respond to the instruction "time to collect your equipment for PE" by picking up on cues other than the verbal instruction used. Additionally, we know that many people process language more successfully when they are in a calm state. In a heightened state of arousal they may be much less able to process language so a visual unchanging representation of the message will be an essential support to communication.

MAKATON

Makaton is a form of key word signing designed specifically for people with learning difficulties and is useful support to spoken language for children with Autism.

Makaton training is offered to all staff and attendance on these in-house courses is mandatory. It is the responsibility of individual members of staff to practice and make use of the skill they have learnt in their daily classroom practice and interactions with others.



PECS

(Picture Exchange Communication System)



The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) is a structured approach that places making exchanges at the heart of the communication process. It is structured over six phases: from simple exchanges of a symbol card for a desired object (motivator), through to facilitating more complex communications, from observations to basic questions. It can be used alongside the spoken word and provides a good method of supporting pupils who may lack the initial drive to communicate.

OTHER AAC

(AUGMENTATIVE and ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION)

At Spring Common, we make use of a wide range of IT solutions to In addition to Makaton and PECS, we support students to access a wide range of AAC (alternative and augmentative communication) systems, both low and high tech, to meet their individual communication needs.

Our Communication & Interaction team, in conjunction with the Speech & Language Therapists, support the implementation of these bespoke solutions.



COMMUNICATE: In Print 2

At Spring Common we make considerable use of the software programme 'Communicate: In print' (CIP) to support our students with ASC. CIP is a word processing programme which provides



visual symbols to support written text. It is a useful support to social stories (to help children with their understanding of the social world around them) and instructional stories (to help children to follow classroom expectations or the requirements of a multi-step task). Whilst CIP provides symbols to go with most words, it is usually more helpful to only include symbols for key words. Children who are able to make use of the programme need some ability to recognise text; the symbols are an aid to comprehension rather than an alternative script.

SPOKEN LANGUAGE

When using verbal forms of communication it is important to be aware of the danger of overloading people with too much language, causing stress and undesirable behavioural consequences. Consequently, it is important to:

- ❖ ensure that the listening environment is optimised by reducing background noise;
- ❖ gain attention by using the student's name and requesting listening but not asking for or expecting eye contact, which may be both distracting and distressing;
- ❖ speak one person at a time, usually with one adult leading and others present staying silent;
- ❖ use as little touch as possible;
- ❖ use as little facial expression as possible;
- ❖ avoid gestures unless using Makaton to support your verbal communication;
- ❖ speak slowly, clearly, calmly and avoid 'shouty' or hectoring language;
- ❖ minimise the use of idiom, slang or marked intonation;
- ❖ use the minimum number of words to communicate your message clearly;
- ❖ allow plenty of time for processing before expecting a response;
- ❖ after allowing processing time use the same language structure to repeat the message;
- ❖ remember to praise successful listening!



There will be times when it is necessary to give verbal instructions without visual support. For some students this will be a less than optimal form of communication and visual cues will always be desirable additions to spoken language.

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPY

A number of children with ASC follow specific speech and language therapy programmes. These programmes will be devised by Speech and Language Therapists (SaLT) in liaison with parents and class teams and delivered in a number of different ways:

- ❖ through direct sessions with a SaLT and follow-up during the school day
- ❖ through individual or group sessions with one of the school's specialist Speech and Language teaching assistants
- ❖ through in class support that is monitored by the SaLT



Chapter Seven

SENSORY ISSUES

One theory to explain what underlies the sensory processing difficulties of many people with ASC is that mechanisms are developed in early childhood to control the flood of incoming stimuli which threatens to overwhelm (Bogdashina, 2003).

This may be achieved by:

- ❖ attending to only one sensory channel at a time
- ❖ avoiding direct perception (for example, by not looking directly at people)
- ❖ by switching off a sensory channel when overwhelmed (for example, leading to the common suspicion of hearing impairment in young children with ASC)
- ❖ by compensating for difficulties in one sensory area by deploying another (for example, by tapping a familiar object to confirm what it is)
- ❖ by becoming immersed, in 'resonance' with another object (for example, losing oneself in the vividness of a particular colour)
- ❖ through a particularly vivid form of 'daydreaming'

These 'defence mechanisms' can both make the student with ASC unavailable for conventional learning experiences and make them likely to experience great stress if a someone cuts across the strategy they are deploying with a particular demand. Consequently, at Spring Common School, with the support of our Occupational Therapy colleagues, we have a range of strategies in place to keep the sensory diet we provide for our students manageable and thereby reduce the need for sensory defensive strategies to be deployed.

It is a central part of our school ethos that all of our children should have access to the full range of experiences offered within the school. For this reason, all students belong to mixed ability class groups, with similarly aged peers. Some students, including those with ASC, require opportunities to follow programmes away from the class group. This may be for a range of reasons, including where the classroom environment cannot be adapted sufficiently to provide a low arousal learning context for a particular child. In this case the

low arousal environments of the ASC base rooms may be timetabled for a child to follow individualised learning programmes.

SENSORY PROFILES

Sometimes a teacher or other member of staff may become concerned about a pattern of behaviours displayed by a child, for example, placing hands over their ears for extended periods of time or repeatedly screaming without obvious cause. In these cases it may be helpful to request the assistance of an Occupational Therapist, who may complete a sensory profile for the child, identifying areas of hyper (over) and hypo (under) sensitivity. The OT will then develop a programme, planning recommendations to support the child.

Recommendations to support the child may involve:

- ❖ changes to the environment
- ❖ planned desensitisation to a particular stimulus that is likely to be unavoidable in the school context
- ❖ a particular exercise programme designed to aid organising, alerting, calming and modulating levels of arousal
- ❖ providing specialist equipment such as ear defenders, chewing tubes, weighted blankets or specialist seating



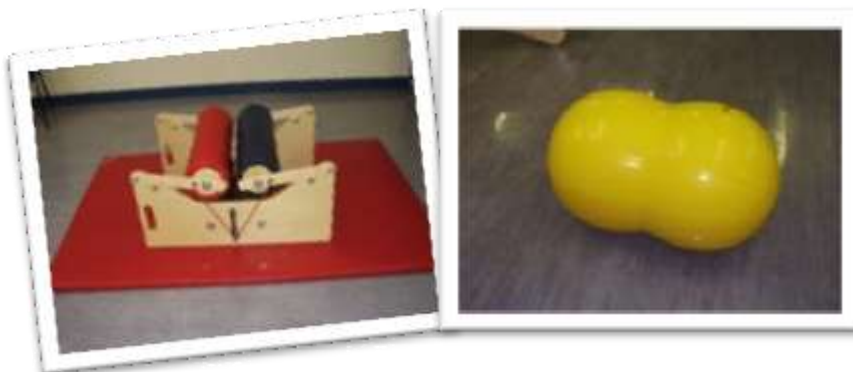
SENSORY INTEGRATION

Sensory Integration (SI) is a form of therapy for people with ASC which comprises a range of different components including swinging, spinning and deep pressure. We are very fortunate at Spring Common in having a dedicated SI room, equipped with a ceiling-hung swing, spinning platform and appropriate padding. The room is timetabled for children who have personalised programmes that have been devised for them by Occupational Therapists.



SENSORY CIRCUITS

Sensory circuits are activity programmes that are designed to alert, organise and calm the sensory processing of children. A range of children at Spring Common follow sensory circuits, which are not an intervention exclusive to students with ASC. Circuits take place in the upper and lower school halls at the beginning of the day. The range of activities that are involved include: balancing, jumping, catching, throwing, spinning and receiving pressure. The equipment required includes: trampettes, therapy balls, hoops, wobble boards, spinning boards, squeeze box, benches and bean bags. The involvement of an OT is necessary to access sensory circuits.



The Occupational Therapy Service suggests that sensory circuits may be useful for children who display the following behavioural characteristics:

- ❖ constant fiddling in class
- ❖ slow to start work and constantly missing cues
- ❖ difficulty organising self
- ❖ lethargic and dreamy
- ❖ poor coordination and balance
- ❖ known sensory processing difficulties
- ❖ constant rocking
- ❖ difficulty paying attention
- ❖ lacking confidence to join in



It is easy to see how many of these behaviours may arise from the core difficulties associated with ASC. However, it is important to note that fiddling may help some children to self-regulate and concentrate on tasks and so it may not always be desirable to try and extinguish such behaviours.

ACTIVE BREAKS

Active breaks are a less formal support to a student's sensory organisation and processing than sensory circuits and may be built into a student's day at fixed times or used flexibly as required.

An active break may take a range of different forms based on a child's Individual needs and may include:

- ❖ a walk outside
- ❖ time spent on particular pieces of the outdoor cardio-vascular equipment (which includes swinging and spinning opportunities)



- ❖ use of a particular part of the equipment used in sensory circuits
- ❖ a period of deep pressure



THE LISTENING PROGRAMME

Students at Spring Common have the opportunity to follow the listening program when this is felt to be appropriate to their individual needs. The listening program is designed to support children with distorted auditory perception to process sounds more successfully. The developers of the program claim benefits in the areas of attention and concentration, listening, speech and language, memory, communication, social skills, reading, sensory integration, self-regulation, physical balance and coordination, vocal performance and musical ability. Whilst we would not be able to show evidence of this wide range of effects there is no doubt that students with ASC who follow this program (or who spend a period at the end of the day listening to other pieces of selected music on personal stereos) find this a valuable activity.

We have a number of children who benefit from access to personal stereos at other times, such as when on transport to an activity. It is believed that by controlling and providing a consistent auditory input this will make children less vulnerable to upset from unexpected external stimuli such as a wait in traffic.



Chapter Eight

BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT

At Spring Common we understand that behaviour is a form of communication. We never conceptualise challenging behaviour as being located within the child as a personality trait but perceive it as providing us with a message about the young person's understanding of the world they are struggling to engage with. When we determine that any particular behaviour is impacting negatively on the student's ability to learn, the student's safety or well-being, the learning or safety of other students, the safety of staff or the smooth running of the school then we will plan an intervention to support change.

Children with ASC who experience challenging behaviour have a behaviour profile drawn up by the ASC team in liaison with classroom staff and parents. This describes the circumstances that may lead to behavioural challenge from the student and the responses that must be deployed by staff. Consistency of approach, including in some cases the exact symbols or language to be used, is essential in helping young people with ASC to re-establish their emotional equilibrium at times of stress and so all staff working with a particular child need to be familiar with and have easy access to a child's behaviour profile. This will be contained within their blue folder, which should be with the student at all times.

In order to support behavioural change and the development of increasingly pro-social behaviour patterns we operate a simple 'plan-do-review' hypothesis testing model:

1

What do we believe is causing the behaviour we are observing?

- ❖ Is this behaviour related to something in the environment?
- ❖ Is this behaviour arising from a difficulty in social comprehension?
- ❖ Does this behaviour arise from a communication difficulty, either receptive or expressive?
- ❖ Is the young person being asked to cope with too many changes without adequate warning or preparation?

2

Based on our responses to the questions above we may seek to implement changes and introduce these into the behaviour profile. Such changes related to the hypotheses above may include:

- ❖ changes to the environment, sensory programmes to support the young person in managing the environment, direct teaching of a new skill such as relaxation to support self regulation
- ❖ the use of a social story, changes in adult interaction style, direct teaching of social approach skills or support for other students in changing their approach towards the young person concerned
- ❖ changes to adult communication methods including curriculum delivery and inter-personal exchanges, the use of communication aids to support the young person in expressing their emotions and wishes in socially acceptable ways
- ❖ review the timetable that the young person is following, revise the scheduling system in place for the young person to ensure that it is sufficiently clear and supportive
- ❖ introduce a behaviour plan with a clear target, recording mechanism and reward system
- ❖ teach a new skill, for example: relaxation, removal to a quiet area, a new communication system, social approach skills. Where a new skill is being taught ensure that adequate tuition and positive reinforcement of successful use is in place

3

Review progress after an agreed period of not more than 6 weeks. Repeat the cycle of steps above, making further changes to the behaviour profile based on what has been learnt through the previous plan – do – review cycle.

SELF AWARENESS

Some of our young people may, at times, be quite overwhelmed and display behaviour that can be distressing and extremely challenging to those who are new to it. Such behaviour may include spitting, biting or uncontrolled lashing out.

Episodes of challenging behaviour can be extremely emotionally charged for adults. Such episodes may impact on staff in unexpected ways, particularly those who are new or inexperienced. It is very important that staff remain self-aware in challenging situations to support our vulnerable students through them. Staff anxiety or upset can easily

communicate itself to vulnerable students heightening their concern and behavioural challenge.

Specific management techniques will be found in each child's behaviour profile, but in general terms:

- ❖ keep speech clear and calm. In general, less is better
- ❖ maintain a composed facial expression
- ❖ maintain a relaxed body posture that is not confrontational
- ❖ be directive and positive, communicating what you wish to happen rather than what is unacceptable
- ❖ hand over to another member of staff if feeling overwhelmed or losing personal control
- ❖ be prepared to accept help from another member of staff who may notice heightened stress levels in you
- ❖ use agreed interventions

After such an episode we understand that members of staff may require a break from direct contact with young people to recover their equilibrium. Senior managers will typically take the responsibility for offering such a break but staff should also request this themselves if required. Subject to the immediate needs of the whole school community such requests will be granted wherever possible.

Following a significant incident, including those involving physical aggression, a formal debrief will be conducted with all staff who have been involved and led by a member of the senior management team. Staff report these debriefs to be very supportive and an excellent opportunity for reflection and moving on. There is a formal written protocol for such debriefs which is available to all staff.

PHYSICAL INTERVENTION

All staff at Spring Common are trained in Team Teach; an accredited approach to de-escalation and planned physical intervention. Whilst physical intervention is used as the last stage of a hierarchy of interventions there are times when it can provide security for young people with ASC and allow for the recovery of emotional equilibrium. When age and level of understanding allows, physical intervention plans are discussed and agreed with children.

Chapter Nine

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

As an area special school Spring Common meets the needs of a wide range of students with learning difficulties. There are times when this means that it is not possible to create the types of environment that one might find in an ASC specific school. However, this also provides opportunities for social learning that would not be on offer in an ASC only context. Many of our young people are highly socially motivated and will approach our students with ASC seeking interaction and engagement. We seek to make the most of these opportunities, teaching all our young people specific social approach skills and teaching students with ASC how to accept invitations to engagement from others, or alternatively, to make clear in socially acceptable ways that these are not welcome.

Opportunities for social engagement and development exist throughout the school day:

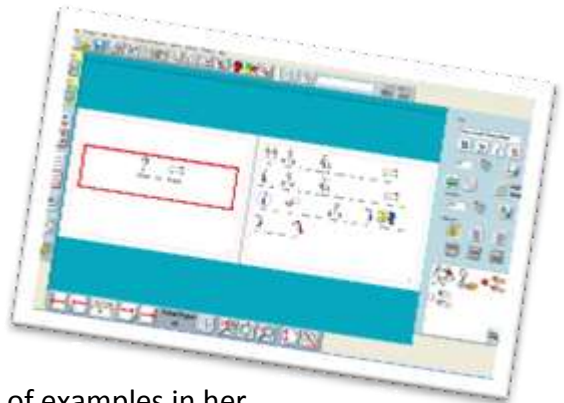
- ❖ in whole class activities
- ❖ in paired and group activities
- ❖ through community based activities
- ❖ at lunchtimes
- ❖ at playtimes

All teachers are expected to include one social development target on the IEPs of children with a diagnosis of ASC.



SOCIAL STORIES

Social stories are a highly effective intervention used widely at Spring Common to support children in understanding the perspectives of others and the rules by which society operates, by explaining these in written form. Although the originator of this methodology, Carol Gray, has produced a wealth of examples in her books we very rarely find that an 'off the shelf' example is suitable. The degree of variance in the particular context that is proving difficult for the child to manage, the cognitive and reading ability of the child and the need to adapt each story to his or her interest means that a personalised version is almost always required.



The ASC team may be approached for support in writing social stories and will willingly assist.

The types of situation for which social stories have proved helpful include:

- ❖ Supporting a child in learning the importance of cleaning teeth and developing a regular teeth cleaning habit.
- ❖ Learning about socially acceptable touch.
- ❖ Anticipating and managing a change to home / school transport.
- ❖ Understanding why it is not acceptable to shout at adults when upset.

PERSONAL, HEALTH AND SOCIAL EDUCATION with LIFE SKILLS (PHSEL)

All students at Spring Common follow a PSHE curriculum. For some of the students with ASC who have particular difficulties in aspects of social functioning we have developed a bespoke curriculum which is flexible and can be adapted to the current needs of the students.

In following this programme students have covered:

- ❖ managing public spaces including shops and cafes
- ❖ kitchen skills including healthy eating and expanding dietary range
- ❖ personal hygiene
- ❖ collaborative working, for example through horticulture tasks
- ❖ understanding the rules of socially acceptable touch
- ❖ road safety
- ❖ personal biographical information such as knowledge of address



SELF AWARENESS FOR CHILDREN WITH HIGHER FUNCTIONING AUTISM/ASPERGER'S SYNDROME

There are a number of children at Spring Common with a diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome (AS), a diagnosis within the Autistic Spectrum. Many children with this diagnosis have reasonable oral language skills and some of the enhanced communication systems in use at the school may not be necessary for them. However, a core component of the diagnosis is difficulty with social communication and so support in this area is frequently required. Children with AS often have strong social motivation but find that their understanding of the rules of social communication hinder their effective functioning. In this case it is often important for the child to develop self-awareness and, for example to understand why their social approach to others may be rebuffed.

Children with AS often understand that they struggle with social communication and experience great frustration related to their difficulties in this area. We run a weekly club at Spring Common, to help our young people with AS understand their own diagnosis and improve their ability to manage social situations.

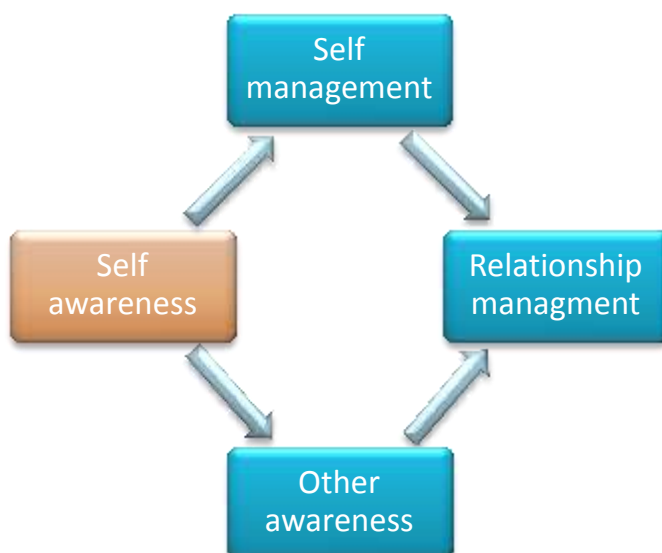
EMOTIONAL LITERACY TRAINING

Occasionally, a young person with high functioning autism experiences very marked difficulties in particular social contexts such as during playtime. On these occasions a personalised emotional literacy programme may be beneficial.

This work seeks to develop skills in the following areas:

- ❖ self-awareness
- ❖ self-management
- ❖ awareness of others
- ❖ relationship management

It is based on the premise that when children have difficulties in interpersonal relationships there is a tendency to intervene at the level of relationship management. For children with autism it is often necessary to support the development of one of the earlier sub skills as shown in the diagram below:



The first step is to help the young person to become aware of his or her own internal emotional functioning. This can then lead on to awareness of the emotional functioning of others (empathy) and management of one's own emotional state. Arguably, only when these 3 components are in place, can we reasonably expect young people to manage relationships successfully.

Chapter Ten

FLEXIBILITY OF THOUGHT

A core characteristic of ASC is 'a strong resistance to change and an aversion to novelty'
(Frith, 2008)

A person with ASC 'starts to suffer if they encounter unexpected change.' They possess a 'strong drive to systemise events, to render them as near to predictable as they can'
(Baron-Cohen, 2008)

Associated with this drive people with ASC may find it hard to:

- ❖ predict what may happen next and thereby prepare mentally for it
- ❖ plan for the future
- ❖ anticipate dangers
- ❖ engage in creative and imaginative play patterns
- ❖ manage new or unfamiliar situations

At Spring Common we seek to build the ability of our students to think flexibly by maximising the benefits of unplanned change and sensitively introducing planned changes to routines and habits.

Some examples of each of these are as follows:

Unplanned change

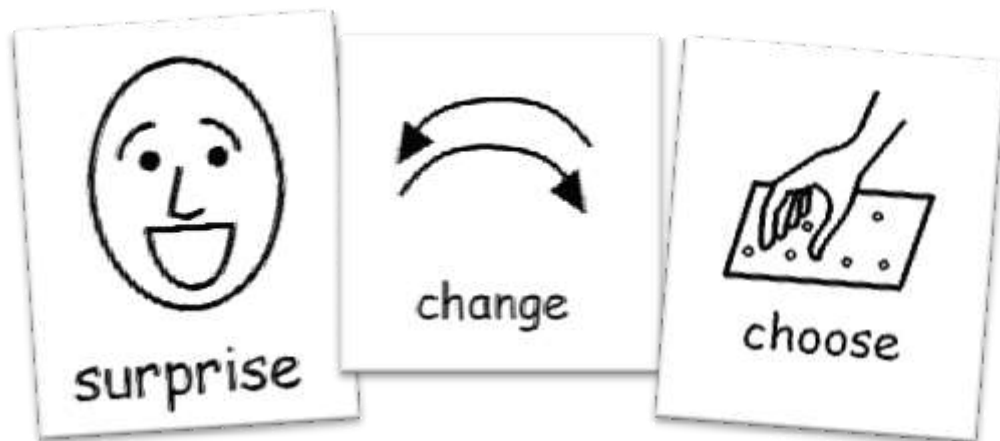
- ❖ The swimming pool is closed due to an imbalance of the chemicals. A brief explanatory story may be written using Communicate: In Print and shared with the student; a 'change' symbol introduced onto the child's schedule alongside the replacement activity.
- ❖ The whiteboard is unusable due to a failure in the internet connection. A 'broken' symbol may be attached to the whiteboard; an alternative activity clarified; reassurance given 'it's OK to change'.
- ❖ This type of unplanned change may be supported by a social story explaining how unexpected change does sometimes happen and that with adult support the child can cope: 'it's OK to change'. This will need to be personalised to each student based on their age, reading skills and level of understanding.

Planned change

- ❖ Taking children on educational visits to new places. A brief explanatory story with pictures of the venue; a written schedule clarifying the stages in the activity.
- ❖ Changing class at the end of the academic year. An information booklet with photographs of the new classroom staff and the new room (providing that this will not be changed before entry to the class).
- ❖ The use of a 'surprise', 'change' or 'choice' symbol on the child's schedule.
- ❖ Offering guided choice of activity through a choosing strip with an option to be selected from. Encouraging choice making in this way helps students with developing their own planning skills.
- ❖ Changing the order of activities during a session, the member of staff a child is working with or their working location.
- ❖ Introduction of new foods into a lunch box. A 'menu card' illustrating the order in which foods will have to be eaten with less favoured to be eaten first.

The preparedness of the individual child to cope with these changes will need to be very carefully considered and the appropriate level of scaffolding provided.

Building flexibility of thought is so central to the development of children with ASC that teachers are encouraged to include IEP targets in this area. It may sometimes be hard to identify these and support from the ASC team in determining these should be sought if required.



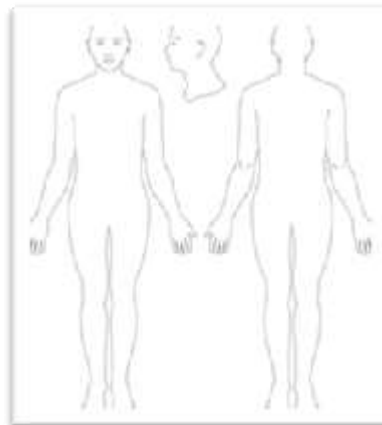
Chapter Eleven

MEDICAL ISSUES

Many children with ASC have another medical condition alongside autism. Examples include ADHD, Epilepsy, Gastrointestinal disorders, Fragile X syndrome, Obsessive compulsive disorder and Anxiety disorder. At Spring Common all children who require one have a medical care plan which is monitored and overseen by the School Nurse. All children are offered a school medical during their time at Spring Common with one of our link Consultant Paediatricians. Many children are seen more frequently, as required. Members of each class team need to be aware of the details of the medical care plan for each child in the class.

Some young people with a restricted diet or oral sensitivity may be very reluctant to take medication orally. Carefully planned interventions using social stories and the advice of the speech and language therapist and occupational therapist may help to overcome this reluctance.

Related to the sensory and communication difficulties experienced by many young people with ASC it may be hard for the child to identify the location of any pain they may be experiencing and describe this accurately to a third person. Using a visual support such as a body map and a word arrow using a meaningful word for the child may help overcome this difficulty.



In addition to the medical conditions listed above many students with ASC experience broader health and well-being difficulties. It is very common for children ASC to have unusual sleep patterns, typically requiring less sleep than most others of their age. A restricted diet, often thought to relate to sensory issues with certain foods, is another very common issue. At Spring Common we will support parental wishes in relation to their child's diet. If required, we work closely with parents to support any programmes in relation to food consumption.

Appendix 1



TEACCH at Spring Common by Jennie Cousins

TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication Handicapped Children) is seen as a whole life approach to supporting those with an ASC diagnosis. It aims to equip those on the autism spectrum with an environment, whereby many of their difficulties can be supported to enable individuals to live and learn without undue stress and anxiety.

The key principles of TEACCH are to provide a system of structured teaching, predictability and the use of visual aids to minimise verbal instructions. This structure aims to utilise the many strengths of children with ASC, such as their visual skills and adherence to routine, to help minimise their difficulties and maximise successful learning opportunities. This approach is intended to enhance the acquisition of skills, by providing a stress-free environment.

Spring Common School endeavours to embed the key principles of the TEACCH programme in the daily structure and set up of classes and sessions in order to support those pupils with an ASC. It is through this approach that staff use structured teaching to help pupils make sense of their surroundings and what is expected of them.



Physical organisation:

Many classes endeavour to provide clear visual boundaries, segmenting the space into recognisable parts that indicate to pupils a clearer sense of context and purpose of what is expected of them. For example: defined area for group activities, work sessions and computer time. Classes also provide work stations/bays for those with ASC who at times may require their own space in a distraction-free part of the classroom in order to work more effectively. Such areas are defined by blank screens and plain boards/walls in order to reduce visual stimuli that may distract, over-stimulate or confuse pupils. At Spring Common School such environment has been set-up most effectively in the ASC bases. These provide such optimum work environments for pupils with ASC and pupils who require it have access to the bases on a weekly/daily basis.

- ❖ When staff are working with pupils at the work stations/bases it is suggested that they sit slightly behind / to the side of the pupil in order to not distract the child and to increase independence.



Schedules:

Schedules play a fundamental role in the TEACCH programme. A schedule provides cues (mainly in visual form) to indicate what activities will occur and in what sequence. This provides pupils with an organisational system for time, providing structure and predictability. By using a visual medium (E.g. visual timetable) provides pupils with more adequate processing time, a concrete point of reference to key information and gives time a physical dimension through a visual breakdown of what is happening. Spring Common provides pupils with a range of schedules to support pupils understand a sequence of events. These are done using a range of visual mediums including objects, photographs, pictures, numbers and words depending on pupils' developmental levels.

Classes have a daily visual symbol/word timetable on display in the classroom which provides a sequence of what activities will be occurring during the day. Daily personalised timetables are also provided for pupils who require a more detailed, personalised schedule. This provides them with a clear, predictable routine of what their day will involve which will hopefully reduce any anxiety about what is happening next. This can then be broken down for individuals by using 'first and then' cards. These are then able to go with pupils to each activity as a constant visual cue of what is happening. Work schedules can also be used to break down a work session or task in order to provide clarity of how long it will take, what is required of them and what will happen next.

It is through the implementation of these schedules that staff provide ongoing visual supports of sequential information to provide structure and predictability for pupils.



Work systems:

An individual work system is intended to give pupils a systematic strategy to approach work that needs to be completed. The four main questions of the work system are:

- ❖ What work?
- ❖ How much work?
- ❖ Concept of finished – making progress?
- ❖ What happens next?

Work systems can be presented in varying formats including written and matching systems. A written work system may include a list of tasks for a session, or a breakdown of a task that can be used to encourage a pupil to work with increased independence on completing tasks. Alternatively, this can be displayed through a symbolic/pictorial or colour coded system where pupils have to match cards to activity/work boxes using the given criteria. Organising work in this way will provide an indication to a pupil of what work needs to be done and provides a time framework to work by (E.g. What needs to be completed before the task/session is completed).

Work systems are set up in such a way that they provide an organisational sequence for the pupils, an area which they may have difficulty in. The work systems and work tasks may be presented top to bottom or left to right, providing a clear system for pupils to follow and work through. Also, work stations can also provide such organisational structure through the physical set-up, with tasks set up in trays or drawers on the left of the pupil and finished work/trays on the right.

Many of those with ASC work more effectively when there is a clear, explicit sign that a task is completed. This can provide a clear concept of 'finished' to the pupil. Work systems can provide such signals through a range of strategies. These include: marking off task completion a card, removing symbol/picture that represents task, putting completed tasks in a 'finish' box/tray, putting tasks back on shelf or on a different shelf.

Work systems can also be particularly effective in using pupils' enthusiasms (obsessions and interests) as motivators. By incorporating opportunity / time for pupils to have on a personalised interest at the end of a work session, not only provides them with an obvious motivator, but also provides a positive insight in to what will be happening next.

Spring Common School implements such work systems to support the pupils both in the classroom and the ASC bases. These aim to provide pupils with the opportunity for directed work (adults supporting pupils learning and consolidating newly acquired skills) in conjunction with the opportunity for independent task completion to take place.

Recording and Progression

Spring Common School base their work sessions on tasks that comprise of individualised activities/tasks based on literacy and numeracy targets taken from pupils B-squared assessment targets. It is the class teacher's responsibility to set up the work task targets (with the support of the autism team if required). Pupil's progress is then recorded on a spread sheet by the adult who delivers the individual sessions using the recording criteria given. Pupils and staff will have a group TEACCH session supervised by one of the school's Autism HLTAs to monitor pupil progress and offer advice and model good practice. Once the pupil has demonstrated that they are able to successfully and consistently able to achieve the target this is then fed back to the class teacher who will be able to update the targets accordingly. Parents are able to request a copy of their child's progress and a list of the targets they are working on to match any activities they wish to complete at home.

It is important that some tasks that the pupil is able to complete independently are left in the session in order to promote confidence and independence.

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Checklist and Planning Pro forma

	<u>Status and actions required</u>
<u>Designated Areas</u>	
Individual workstations	
Paired and group work areas	
Areas for 1-1 programmes	
Whole group / social area	
Quiet withdrawal zone	
Other	
<u>Furniture and Resources</u>	
Low level furniture and screens	
Tray stacks	
Accessible resources including communication aids	
Accessible schedules	
Storage areas for personal items	
Other	
<u>Sensory needs</u>	
Consideration given to light levels	
Consideration given to noise levels and strategies to manage	
Displays are relevant and not over stimulating	
Tactile defensiveness considered in choice of materials	
Other	

COMMUNICATION CHECKLIST

	<u><i>Status and actions required</i></u>
Planning includes communication opportunities and individualised resources	
Staff model good communication appropriate to individual children	
Pupils are given time and opportunity to initiate interactions	
Communication cues are used to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alert pupils to communication - Alert pupils to activity - Introduce the activity - Guide pupils through the activity - Review what has been done 	
Medium and short term plans identify vocabulary to be experienced and taught	
Personalised schedules, timetables and diaries are used	
Class visual timetables are set out prominently	
Transitions are supported with music or songs	
A range of question types are used to expand and enhance communication	
Communication passports are active documents used by all staff	
Standard curriculum and resource symbols are used	
Objects, photographs and symbols are used to aid engagement and hold attention	
Communication aids are accessible and used in all appropriate contexts	
Each child is given a fair share of opportunity for communication	
Skills from speech and language programmes are applied widely	
There are close links with parents about communication programmes and targets	
Children are involved in setting and recording of communication targets	

BEHAVIOUR
INTERVENTION PLANNING

Step 1: What are the antecedents / causes of the behaviour? Consider:

- a. Environment
- b. Social comprehension
- c. Communication difficulty
- d. Unexpected changes
- e. Transitions
- f. Other

Conclusion:

Step 2: Planned intervention. Consider:

- a. Environmental changes
- b. Sensory programmes
- c. Direct behavioural teaching
- d. Social Story
- e. Social skills training
- f. Communication system changes
- g. Rewards system
- h. Timetable
- i. Other

Conclusion:

Stage 3: Review

There is a lending resource library in the Upper School ASC base which all staff are welcome to borrow from. This is being added to all of the time.

Book titles:

Autism – A very short introduction by Uta Frith

This book is written by a leading academic in the area of autism but is very readable.

Autism and Asperger Syndrome by Simon Baron-Cohen

A little like Uta Frith's book this is a short introductory book but is probably more academic for those interested in the scientific study of autism.

Sensory Perceptual Issues in Autism and Asperger Syndrome

by Olga Bogdashina

As the title suggests this book focuses on the different sensory experiences people with autism have, and some of the programmes that may help.

Behavioural Concerns and Autistic Spectrum Disorders

by John Clements and Ewa Zarkowska

This book explores many dimensions of behavioural challenge in people with ASCs, including causation, the impact of behaviour on others, support and intervention.

Autism: An inside-out approach by Donna Williams

Donna Williams is an internationally renowned speaker on living with autism. This book explains the problems of being autistic in the modern world.

A Positive Approach to Autism by Stella Waterhouse

This is a book with a medical orientation which considers the relationship of autism to other developmental conditions.

Asperger Syndrome, the Universe and Everything

by Kenneth Hall

A short first-hand account of living with Asperger Syndrome, by a 10 year old boy with this diagnosis. It is lively, funny and engaging.

Freaks, geeks and Asperger Syndrome: A user guide to adolescence

by Luke Jackson

Probably the best known personal perspective on Asperger Syndrome written by a young person this is a very enjoyable and interesting read covering how Luke's AS impacts on his life and thinking as a teenager.

Can I tell you about Asperger Syndrome?

by Jude Welton

This is written by a psychologist from the perspective of a 10 year old with Asperger Syndrome to help others in the family and school to understand the condition.

Autism with Severe Learning Difficulties

by Rita Jordan

Autism is a condition which exists across the range of learning ability and this book is a useful focus on those children with autism and severe learning difficulties. Rita Jordan is a very well respected researcher and lecturer in autism from Birmingham

Thinking in Pictures

by Temple Grandin

This is a personal account by a very gifted American animal scientist with Autism of her own experiences.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time

by Mark Haddon

This is first and foremost a novel but does give some insight into the thinking of its narrator, who has Asperger's Syndrome.

Neurotribes

by Steve Silberman

A best-selling narrative exploring the history of Autism and highlighting its cultural significance.

HELPFUL WEBSITES

SPRING COMMON ACADEMY

www.springcommon.cambs.sch.uk

NATIONAL AUTISTIC SOCIETY

www.autism.org.uk

The leading UK charity offering advice, support and community links

AUTISM RESEARCH CENTRE (ARC)

www.autismresearchcentre.com

Researches biomedical cases of ASC and assesses interventions

WRONG PLANET

www.wrongplanet.net

Online community and resource for people with Asperger's Syndrome

AUTISM ALLIANCE

www.springcommon.cambs.sch.uk

Network of autism charities across the UK

ASPERGERS & ASD ONLINE FORUM

www.asd-forum.org.uk

Asperger's & ASD UK online forum