

## **Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)**

A ready reference for Parents and Teachers

### **For further information:**

NAS, West Berkshire Branch  
Website: [www.nas.org.uk](http://www.nas.org.uk)

### **Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)**

Students with ASD have difficulties in social interaction, communication and areas which involve imagination.

#### **Main Characteristics**

Students with ASD may actually be able to be quite creative in ways that revolve around special but restrictive interests. They may display quite elaborate routines or the need to do things in a particular way. They may also have difficulties with sensory overload or have repetitive sensory behaviours which are pleasurable but may present barriers to learning. The student may be very disorganised and clumsy or very obsessive about things being in a particular order or position which they need them to be. They may be quite assertive in these demands or may well be very isolated and removed.

#### **Students with ASD cover the full range of ability, and the severity of the impairment varies widely.**

It is important to think in terms of implementing appropriate strategies that are based on the specific learning characteristics and styles of students on the Autistic Spectrum. Underpinning this approach is the importance of on-going assessment and respect for the culture of autism. The aim of good practice is therefore to provide an appropriate learning environment and teaching strategies that take into account the preferred learning styles of students with ASD. This will support their ability to gain meaning from their environment and manage behaviour that may form barriers to learning.

There are four aspects of structure that need to be taken into account when assessing the structural needs of individual ASD students: physical structure, schedules, work systems and visual information.

#### **Potential Impacts of Characteristics on Learning**

##### **Physical Structure**

Many students with ASD find a normal, busy and stimulating classroom environment stressful, confusing and distracting. Assessment of the individual within this setting may indicate the type and level of structure that he may require to support access to learning. Structures that require consideration are as follows:–

**Routines:** General class routines and routines that form an integral part of learning activities that may be generalised.

**Physical Structure:** Organising the environment to support and inform the student providing meaning and associations.

**Daily Schedules:** Individualised timetables that portray daily events and identify the sequence of the day and activities facilitating predictability, transition and lowering anxiety.

**Work systems:** Provide strategies to support independent work, clarifies expectations and identifies for the student: What work is to be completed? How much work? When have I completed the task/activities? What happens next? By following the work system the student is able to work independently and generalise skills to new settings.

**Visual structures:** These are used to make the best use of the student's visual abilities and strengths and minimise their difficulties with processing auditory information. Visual structures include instructions, organisation and clarity, and highlight the important information.

**An ASD diagnosis in West Berks is arrived at through referral to CAMHs and an assessment called the ADOS assessment.**

### **Suggested Support Strategies**

- Can sometimes be so distant in lessons that the student does not hear instructions.
- Does not always understand conceptual expressions or phrases, and misunderstands what is being asked of him/her.
- The student needs things to be concrete or visual to make sense so doesn't always understand questions.
- Needs teachers to call their name for them to realise they are included in an instruction.
- Often shows signs of stress when concentrating and is agitated.
- Give advance warning of any changes to usual routine, e.g. change of classroom, change of teacher etc.
- Needs worksheets to be very obvious in what they demand. Link the task with the learning objectives.
- Liaise with parents; they may have some useful strategies.
- Avoid asking direct questions but ask the student to write answers down.
- Give individual instructions, using the student's name.
- Avoid using too much eye contact as this can cause distress.
- Use real examples of places within their experience.
- Use as many real life experiences as possible.
- Provide visual resources in class: objects, artefacts, pictures, picture dictionaries.
- If possible put student in a small group if group work is necessary.
- Use computers. Students with autism can have unusual fixations on parts of objects. They may focus on objects as though through a tunnel. When using a computer this can mean that they are able to focus totally on the screen and to block out all distractions around them. Using a computer can provide a secure, comfortable environment as they feel more in control of their surroundings.

### **SEN Staffing**

**Deputy Head Student Progress & Inclusion:** Mrs M Sims

**Special Educational Needs and Disability Coordinator (SENDCo):** Mrs J Hale

**Specialist Teacher:** Mrs J Wheeler