



The Federation of Sacred Heart & St Mary's RC Primary School, Battersea

AUTISM GUIDANCE POLICY

Approved By	Governors
Reviewed On	October 2024
Review Due	October 2025
Review Cycle	Annually

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide a comprehensive understanding of autism and outline the inclusive practices and strategies that will be used to support neurodiverse pupils. This policy ensures that best practices for supporting autistic pupils are applied consistently across the school, promoting an environment of respect, understanding, and full participation.

Autism

Autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental variation that affects how an individual experiences the world, communicates, and engages with others. Autistic individuals often have unique sensory, social, and communication needs, and may benefit from specific supports that help them thrive in everyday environments. While some may require more support than others, the aim is to enable all autistic individuals to participate fully and meaningfully in their communities. Autism occurs across all cultural, ethnic, and social backgrounds, and should be viewed as part of human diversity rather than a disorder or deficit.

Being Autistic

Autism is a spectrum, and autistic individuals have a wide range of strengths, interests, and challenges. While some autistic people may have difficulties in specific areas such as social communication or sensory processing, these traits are simply part of a different way of interacting with the world. Like all individuals, autistic people have diverse talents, strengths, and contributions to make.

Key traits of autism may include:

- Differences in social communication and interaction.
- Strong preferences for routine and predictability.
- Sensory sensitivities, either heightened or diminished.
- Focused interests that bring great satisfaction and expertise.
- Increased levels of anxiety, particularly in uncertain or overstimulating environments.

Recognising Autism

Some children may arrive at school with an autism diagnosis, while others may begin to exhibit traits later. It is important that teachers and staff are trained to recognise the variety of ways in which autism can present and to respond with understanding and appropriate adjustments. The academic, social, and sensory demands of school may prompt certain traits to become more noticeable. Early identification and support are essential to ensure the child's well-being and success in the school environment.

Key signs to look out for include:

Differences in social communication, such as taking things literally, requiring extra time to process verbal information, or using echolalia.

Preferences for time alone or reduced social interaction when overwhelmed.

A strong need for routine and predictable activities to reduce anxiety.

Sensory sensitivities, such as aversion to loud noises or bright lights, which can cause distress or discomfort.

Other signs to look out for include:

Sensory Sensitivities

Autistic individuals often experience the world through a heightened or reduced sensory lens. Schools should make accommodations to help autistic pupils manage their sensory environment, recognising that certain sounds, lights, textures, or smells may cause discomfort or pain. Adjustments to reduce sensory overload, such as offering quiet spaces, dimming lights, or allowing sensory aids, can help create a more supportive environment for all neurodiverse students.

Highly Focused Interests

Many autistic people have deep, focused interests, which should be embraced and encouraged. These interests provide a sense of joy, purpose, and expertise. Incorporating these into the learning environment can help engage autistic pupils, improve their confidence, and highlight their strengths. These interests can also provide a bridge for social connections with peers who share similar passions.

Extreme Anxiety

Anxiety is common among autistic individuals, especially in environments that are unpredictable or overwhelming. Recognising that anxiety may manifest in different ways—whether through physical symptoms, emotional outbursts, or withdrawal—is key. Staff will be trained to provide emotional support, and strategies such as clear expectations, reduced uncertainty, and access to calming spaces can help mitigate anxiety and support self-regulation.

Meltdowns and Shutdowns

Meltdowns and shutdowns occur when an autistic person becomes overwhelmed, often by sensory input, emotional stress, or social demands. These are not behavioural issues but responses to overwhelming situations. Meltdowns may involve crying, shouting, or physical distress, while shutdowns are more internal, with the person becoming unresponsive or withdrawn. Staff should respond with empathy and provide calming, supportive environments where the child can recover without judgment or punishment.

Assessment and Diagnosis

A formal diagnosis of autism is typically made by a multi-disciplinary team of healthcare professionals. However, schools should take an inclusive approach, ensuring that pupils who exhibit traits of autism receive support, regardless of formal diagnosis. Teachers and support staff will be trained to make reasonable adjustments in the classroom environment to accommodate the needs of autistic pupils, including adjustments to communication, sensory stimuli, and classroom activities.

Strategies to Assist Autistic Pupils

Supporting autistic pupils requires a flexible, individualised approach. Some pupils may benefit from working in small groups, while others may thrive with one-to-one support or in a mainstream classroom with reasonable adjustments. Key strategies may include:

- Fostering cooperative learning opportunities around shared interests.
- Allowing pupils to develop independence while providing the structure they need.
- Simplifying language, gestures, and facial expressions for clarity.
- Offering clear indications of the task at hand and defining what “finished” looks like.
- Using visual supports such as charts, schedules, and timers to help autistic pupils understand expectations.

- Providing advanced notice of changes to routine and minimising sudden transitions.

These strategies will be adapted as necessary to meet the individual needs of each child and will be reinforced through ongoing staff training and development.

Hilary House

Hilary House is a specialist base within Sacred Heart R.C. Primary School that supports up to 20 autistic children. Each child follows a personalised, differentiated curriculum that supports both their academic and social development. The base also provides opportunities for interaction with the wider school community, enabling pupils to participate in mainstream education as appropriate. The goal of Hilary House is to offer a structured, supportive environment where children can thrive at their own pace, while still having opportunities for social integration with their peers.

The school uses a range of evidence-based approaches, including:

- Structured routines and consistent systems to provide predictability and security.
- High staff-to-pupil ratios to ensure tailored support
- The use of TEACCH and SCERTS frameworks to promote social communication, emotional regulation, and independence.

TEACCH

The TEACCH approach emphasises the importance of understanding each pupil's unique learning style and using visual supports to foster independence. TEACCH values include collaboration with families, a holistic understanding of the pupil's needs, and promoting flexibility throughout the individual's life. The aim is to empower each pupil to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally.

SCERTS

SCERTS is a framework focused on Social Communication, Emotional Regulation, and Transactional Support. This approach aims to help children become active participants in social interactions and develop self-regulation skills. By creating supportive environments and using tailored communication strategies, we enable pupils to engage in learning and social activities in a way that reduces anxiety and fosters well-being.

National and Local Guidance

This policy is aligned with national and local guidance, including:

- The National Strategy for Autistic Children, Young People, and Adults (2021-2026).
- The SEND Code of Practice (2015).
- The Equality Act (2010).
- Wandsworth's SEND Strategy (2020-2024).

Policy Aims and Principles

- All staff will receive training on autism and neurodiversity to ensure they can effectively support autistic pupils.
- Early intervention and personalised support plans are key to promoting success and inclusion for all autistic pupils.

- Sacred Heart and St Mary's Schools are committed to providing equal opportunities for autistic pupils, ensuring they have access to the same high-quality education and experiences as their peers.
- Collaboration with parents, carers, and external professionals is essential for creating an inclusive and supportive environment.
- The policy is aligned to our school safeguarding policy and behaviour policy.