

Reasonable Adjustments Needed at School: Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a recognised disability under the Equality Act 2010 and as such Reasonable Adjustments should be made in any educational setting
- Adjustments are legally required in order to achieve 'inclusion' for the pupil. 'Inclusion' does *not* mean that the pupil should be encouraged to join in as many activities with other pupils as possible; it means implementing adjustments so that the pupil has the opportunity to achieve the same *outcomes* as other pupils
- Outcomes include mental health wellbeing, academic attainment and social success
- Expectations for the pupil's behaviour should be communicated but conformance can only be expected once adjustments have been fully implemented by school
- It is critical to the success of implementing adjustments that they *must* be acceptable to the pupil otherwise they will just increase anxiety and escalate behaviour. Often the main reason an adjustment may not be acceptable is that it makes the pupil stand out as different from their peers
- It is also important to consider whether the whole experience of being in the educational environment is just too much for the child, even with proper implementation of adjustments, in such a case alternative provision should be sought to prevent development of mental health problems
- Autism Spectrum Disorder often co-occurs with ADHD and other neurodevelopmental differences. The presentation in pupils with a co-occurring condition can be very different to those with ASD alone

How to use this document:

- This template is provided as a discussion point between pupils, parents / carers and teachers following a diagnosis of ASD. All adjustments must be discussed with the pupil's parents/carers as the experts on their own child because they can provide the best opinion on the potential impact, effectiveness and appropriateness of the adjustments under consideration

- It provides suggestions of some effective adjustments which are known to support students with ASD
- It is important that everyone involved with the pupil on a day to day basis, including the pupil themselves, work in partnership to agree upon the most appropriate adjustments to be implemented for them
- It is critical to the success of implementing adjustments that they *must* be acceptable to the pupil, otherwise if they are socially exposing they will just increase anxiety and escalate behaviour
- Often the main reason an adjustment may not be acceptable is that it makes the pupil stand out as different from their peers
- Strategies and provisions may be offered which are not listed in this document if acceptable to the pupil
- Parent / carers should have frequent access to speak with relevant teaching staff and the SEN / ALN department to discuss the appropriateness and effectiveness of the adjustments
- It is school's responsibility, with support from parent / carers to implement adjustments informing all staff in the same way that staff are informed of pupils with food intolerances, epilepsy etc
- **Respectful and open communications between staff and parent / carers is the best approach**

Please highlight / select the most appropriate strategies for the pupil and include these in all advice documents provided to staff to assist them in working with the pupil.

Social Communication: Does the pupil experience any challenges with the following?

<i>Mark challenge</i>	Tick
Non-reciprocal communication style – struggles with turn taking in conversations	
Interrupts frequently – limited awareness about turn taking in conversations leads to no awareness of the social rules about when to interrupt	
Can speak for too long – cannot judge the needs of the listener	
May not communicate when the topic is not on their agenda	
Will be repetitive with language	
Can speak impulsively and inappropriately – needs to speak when they have the thought otherwise will forget	
They have difficulty understanding social context	
Limited recognition of own and other's emotional states and therefore great difficulty in communicating about this	

Possible Adjustments: what will help the pupil?

<i>Mark adjustments that will be implemented</i>	Tick
Staff to tolerate lack of turn taking	
Staff could set expectations about length of time to talk or make the time to listen	
Ignore / do not draw attention to any repetitive language	
Do not ask how the pupil feels but what they think	
Support recognition of emotional states - do not ask for identification just label the emotion so that he/she learns and improves knowledge in this area.	

Non-Verbal Communication: Does the pupil experience any challenges with the following?

<i>Mark challenge</i>	Tick
Facial expression does not match their mood – they may smirk when nervous and this can be misinterpreted by others as defiance	
Does not understand tone of voice and gesture	

Possible Adjustments: what will help the pupil?

<i>Mark adjustments that will be implemented</i>	Tick
Do not interpret the pupil's facial expressions as relevant to context, listen to their words and observe other behaviours to understand their emotional state and also ask parents retrospectively about how to interpret behaviour in any given context.	
Do not assume they will understand your tone of voice and facial expression, use language in a manner that will convey the message you are communicating with your non-verbal communication (see next section).	

Literal Understanding of Language: Does the pupil experience any challenges with the following?

<i>Mark challenge</i>	Tick
The pupil cannot make inferences about language	
Humour – limited understanding	
Sarcasm – does not understand, interprets literally	
Idioms – does not understand	

Possible Adjustments: what will help the pupil?

<i>Mark adjustments that will be implemented</i>	Tick
Use short sentences	
Avoid idioms, sarcasm, metaphors, imaginative / poetic language in general conversation	
When teaching figurative language, ensure that the pupil understands the context	
Instructions must be complete not missing out steps that would normally be assumed	
Language must be unambiguous; they will perceive ambiguity where neurotypical people will not. Be specific when asking questions and making statements.	

Social Interaction: Does the pupil person experience challenges with the following?

<i>Mark challenge</i>	Tick
Lack of awareness of social status/hierarchy – sees self as an equal, will not acknowledge authority when the authority is wrong or has been unfair	
Mentalising difficulties (Theory of Mind) where the pupil has a limited ability to understand how they are perceived by others and what other people's intentions and motives are	
Can be easily led, tricked or deceived	
Does not see the need to make eye contact and finds it uncomfortable	
Dislikes social exposure, does not want to stand out from their peers as different	
Not aware of social impact of what they say	
Constant questioning: in some circumstances due to either interest or anxiety	
Cannot see things from another's point of view – does not recognise extenuating circumstances	
The pupil does not respond to other's distress even when visually obvious i.e. injury	

Possible Adjustments: what will help the pupil?

<i>Mark adjustments that will be implemented</i>	Tick
Do not ask for eye contact	
Be tolerant of comments which may seem rude or challenging. Try to understand the reasons for the comments in relation to the pupil's lack of understanding of hierarchy / social context	
Use social stories to teach social rules	
Use Comic Book Conversations to explain social scenarios and social rules	

Flexibility of Thinking: Does the pupil experience challenges with the following?

<i>Mark challenge</i>	Tick
Black and white thinking style, difficulty with accepting other opinions and following advice. Much less flexible about adopting a different approach, a need to do things in their own way. A dislike of redundancy (e.g. showing maths workings – what's the point? the answer is correct)	
Perfectionist – does not like making mistakes and will try to avoid tasks that they will fail at	
Very sensitive to changes to routines, anxiety when their expectations about what is happening in life are not met. Needs pre-warning and transition planning and will resist change and needs control to feel secure and less anxious	
Sensitive to changes in their environment, may be annoyed or upset at changes because things are not where they expects them to be	
Extreme difficulty engaging when subject is not on their agenda	
A very strong belief that schoolwork is only for school not home	
Difficulty understanding the scope of assignments, difficulty with summarising / prioritising information according to the brief	
Struggles with focussing on details in questions / missing out key parts	

Possible Adjustments: what will help the pupil?

<i>Mark adjustments that will be implemented</i>	Tick
Once 'on task' try not to interrupt and allow the pupil to finish even if the rest of the class has moved on	
Pre-warn of any changes to routines and/or environment and allow time to calm down and adjust when changes occur	
Display a visual timetable so that the pupil knows the routine of the week or plan for lessons on certain days: stick to it. This will give pupils a chance to think about forthcoming events.	
Provide tasks on a handout and ask the pupil to tick off as they complete each part of the task as they complete it	
Where appropriate, link tasks to their interests	
Give extra time to complete tasks	
Give very specific guidance on how to complete tasks, do NOT use a questioning approach, show / model so that they can learn by example	
The pupil may need their own seat / place in class and their own equipment that is kept in a specific place	
If the pupil asks a question, answer it directly: do not respond with another question to try and support the child to discover the answer themselves. This is completely nonsensical and annoying for the autistic pupil	
Focus on highlighting / underlining all key parts of questions	

Adjustments for Sensory Processing

The pupil may be affected by a range of sensory processing experiences. Understand the pupil's sensory processing differences by consulting with them and their parent/carers to make adjustments accordingly. Some possible examples are detailed below:

Sound – the pupil cannot tolerate loud environments / finds them overwhelming	Permission not to attend celebration assembly or permission to leave class and go to a designated quiet place.
Pain – the pupil may be hyper (over sensitive or hyper (under sensitive to pain) A high pain threshold can be dangerous as serious injury is not recognised. A low pain threshold means experience of pain is intense for minor bumps and scrapes	Be understanding if the pupil becomes extremely upset over what may seem to be an insignificant injury, such as a paper cut, as the visual sight of blood can often be more of a trigger for distress than an unseen injury
Smell – the pupil is particularly sensitive to certain smells / can detect smells that others can't	Allow the pupil to sit by a window if this helps or perhaps work in a different room / area if this is safely possible
Interoception (internal sensations) examples may include the pupil may not know when they are hungry, thirsty or need to use the toilet	Prompting the pupil to drink / eat lunch / go to the toilet. This could be with a prompt card or verbally (to be agreed with the pupil and parent / carers)
Taste: The pupil may have a restricted diet	Allow the pupil to bring their own lunch with them

Other features: Does the pupil experience challenges with the following?

<i>Mark challenge</i>	Tick
Motor restlessness: constant fidgeting / moving hands	
Attention difficulties	

Possible Adjustments: what will help the pupil?

<i>Mark adjustments that will be implemented</i>	Tick
Allow the pupil to engage in background activity to help them with concentration – this may be a fidget toy or familiar object to hold	
Allow movement breaks	

Skills / Interests: How to use these to value and support the pupil?

In addition to the pupil's many sensitivities and challenges they will also have some significant strengths relating to interests, memory for interests and attention to detail. List these strengths and recommend that staff use interests as a vehicle for learning and also to praise the pupil, giving them credibility, which will help to support their self-esteem.

Adjustments Required for a 'Demand Avoidance' Presentation of Autism

Traditional adjustments used to support a pupil with Autism may not be successful if used with a pupil who has a Demand Avoidant presentation of Autism. The pupil's anxiety levels increase in response to the minor everyday demands (PDA). Continuing to insist and make direct demands may only escalate their anxiety.

Communication: Does the pupil experience challenges with the following?

<i>Mark challenge</i>	Tick
Direct demands / requests cause anxiety, resulting in the pupil refusing to engage with tasks or follow instructions	

Possible Adjustments: what will help the pupil?

<i>Mark adjustments that will be implemented</i>	Tick
Make suggestions rather than direct instructions or demands	
Avoid insisting on responses to questions	
Allude to possible courses of action	
Provide choices	
Acknowledge anxiety and give adequate time for the pupil to respond	
Make demands on others implying the child's compliance, for example: 'X is working really well, I would like to see you doing the same'	
Decide on the situations, usually around safety risks, where it is necessary to insist on compliance	
Avoid visual timetables as they are likely to be perceived as a list of demands to worry about	
Avoid strategies that are apparent to peers at school as this will cause further anxiety not relief	
Tolerate the pupil spending more time on their own agenda	

De-prioritise academic work until anxiety levels are low, it is likely that they are working below their academic potential due to the difficulties	
Always refer to parents for advice about situations in school especially when difficulties are known but being masked and are not obvious. This means implementing adjustments that may not appear to be necessary	

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