AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER FRIENDLY SCHOOL GUIDELINES 2016

Developed by the Western Isles Educational Psychology Service in collaboration with the Principal Teachers of Learning Support

Background

Autistic Spectrum Disorders are complex and impact differently on different individuals. They can have varying levels of impact on functioning in communication, socialisation and thought/behaviour. The impact is independent of intellectual ability, to a great extent. Those with high intellectual levels may function only with considerable difficulties in their day-to-day lives.

 In recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of children identified in the Western Isles as having an Autism Spectrum Disorder; the current incidence level is 1 in 85 here, and 1 in 71 in Scotland. Increases are reported throughout the UK and internationally; there is a strong likelihood that this is due to increased awareness on the part of educators, parents, and professionals. Recent studies suggest that a rate of around 1 in 100 is currently the best estimate of the prevalence in children (Mental Health of Children and Young People in Great Britain 2004 (Green et al 2005) [Office of National Studies].

The increased diagnosis rate is having considerable impact on the demands made on statutory and voluntary services. The PHIS Report states, "Autism Spectrum Disorders are lifelong, complex, controversial, challenging to service providers, they can cause severe impairments and they are not uncommon" (PHIS, 2002, p. 7).

The purpose of this document is to provide a framework to support professionals and parents/carers in meeting the educational needs of pupils with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. The document takes a broad view of the aims of education and of what may be included in educational programmes. The aims of education are to prepare young people for a happy, successful adulthood in which they are able to live independently if possible, to exercise choices in relation to their lives, and to enjoy successful friendships and relationships. As such it aims to support children and young people to become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

This document supports both Western Isles and Scottish Government policies in relation to inclusive education, and assumes that almost all pupils with Autism Spectrum Disorders will be educated in their local mainstream school.

Autism Spectrum Disorders

Children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder exhibit, to a greater or lesser degree, a **triad of impairments**. These characteristics help define autism:

- Language impairment across all modes of communication: speech, use of language, intonation, gesture, facial expression and other body language.
- Rigidity and inflexibility of thought process: resistance to change, obsessional and ritualistic behaviour.
- Difficulties with social relationships, poor social timing, lack of social empathy, rejection of normal body contact, inappropriate eye contact,

In addition to this triad of impairments there will also be accompanying sensory sensitivities, for example to touch, light, smell, noise and/or taste, and these sensitivities may vary in the course of a day or from day to day.

Children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder may also have other 'co-morbid' difficulties such as Developmental Co-ordination Disorders (DCD), Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Dyslexia, Tourette's Syndrome, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and/or secondary mental health problems. Because individuals may have significant competencies and strengths their Autism Spectrum Disorder may not be apparent in some situations, but individuals of average or above average ability will not necessarily have fewer needs in terms of day-to-day functioning and may have a very significant degree of social difference and difficulty.

Potential Competencies

Individuals with an autism spectrum disorder often have real strengths that can be built upon by schools, and by parents. These may include:

- Attention to detail
- Often highly skilled in a particular area
- Deep study resulting in encyclopaedic knowledge on areas of interest
- Tendency to be logical (helpful in decision-making where emotions may interfere)
- Less concern for what others may think of them (can be a strength and a challenge). Can result in novel "big picture" insights due to different ways of looking at things, ideas, and concepts.
- Visual processing (thinking in pictures or video)
- Often very verbal (propensity of giving detailed descriptions may be useful in providing directions to lost persons)
- Direct communication
- Loyalty, honesty, and can often provide non-judgemental listening

Potential Challenges

Although it is difficult to generalise about individuals with an autism spectrum disorder, there are often areas of potential difficulties or deficits that these individuals tend to experience, to varying extents:

- Grasping the "big" or overall picture
- Uneven set of skills
- Difficulty in developing motivation to study areas not of interest
- Difficulty perceiving emotional states of others
- Perceiving unwritten rules of social interaction. But can learn these rules through direct instruction and social narratives
- Difficulty parsing out and summarizing important information for a conversation
- Sensory integration problems where input may register unevenly, distorted, and difficulty in screening out background noise.
- Generalization of skills and concepts
- Difficulty expressing empathy in ways that others expect or understand
- Executive functioning resulting in difficulties planning long-term tasks
- Problems with 'Theory of Mind', or of being able to understand things from someone else's perspective
- Difficulties in understanding the social use of language
- Problems with inferential thinking
- Difficulties with non-literal language.

Diagnosis and Assessment

The diagnosis of an Autism Spectrum Disorder is ultimately the responsibility of the relevant health professionals but the diagnosis is made in consultation with members of the Western Isles Education and Children's Services working within integrated, multi-agency teams.

There will be some children who have not yet completed the assessment leading to diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder, or who have some characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorders but do not meet the criteria for formal diagnosis. Where this is the case, services will respond to the child's needs, and the response will not be constrained by the presence or absence of a diagnosis.

Partnership with Parents and Carers

The Western Isles recognises that parents/carers are the earliest, longest serving and most continuous carers and educators for almost all children – "professionals" with respect to their own child (it is appreciated that the most significant carer for a child may not be a blood relation, but a foster parent, grandparent, older sibling or other carer). Collaborative working with parents/carers is vital. Both during assessment and diagnosis, and following diagnosis, parents/carers need continuing support and information to enhance their understanding of their child's difficulties and of the nature of their child's disorder. It is expected that all will work together for the best interests of the child or young person.

Good Practice that is Essential for All Children

Close liaison between school staff and parents/carers is essential if children are to gain maximum benefit from teaching programmes and to ensure that appropriate and coordinated support is given both in school and at home. It is vital therefore that parents/carers are consulted and kept involved in all assessment and decision making processes. They should be offered opportunities to take part in staff development activities to enable all staff to appreciate the parental perspective and the child's needs.

The Education Service will actively encourage and enable parents/carers to participate fully in decisions about their child's education by informing and consulting with them, and by taking account of information which parents/carers contribute. Equal value should be placed on the different areas of expertise, knowledge and skill that teachers, parents/carers and other professionals bring to the partnership.

It is important to ensure that the child's school offers a welcoming environment for parents/carers and that appropriate time and priority is given to discussing any issues in a positive way. Sufficient time should be available to class teachers and to those who have co-ordinating and/or management responsibility to carry out this important function. Commonly used methods of communication and liaison include:

- A home-school book, used on a daily or weekly basis (or perhaps less frequently) to share information between parents/carers and staff in school.
- Regular meetings are required to ensure that the approaches used at home and in school are consistent and that the same goals and targets are given priority in both settings

An equal, active and successful partnership between parents/carers and their child's school is supported by:

- The expectation that schools will initially discuss any concerns with a child's parents/carers and will not involve specialist services unless parents/carers give their informed consent.
- Active encouragement of parents/carers to contribute their knowledge and information about their child to assessment and planning processes.
- Written reports being presented to and discussed with parents/carers wherever possible, before being circulated to other professionals. Any errors of fact should be amended, and when there is a difference of opinion between the professionals and parents/carers, this should be noted in the report.
- Reports from school and other professionals being presented to parents/carers in advance of any meetings where the contents are likely to be discussed.
- The provision of joint training for parents/carers and professionals.
- The provision of clear information for parents/carers about procedures for Childs Plans and how they can contribute.
- Highlighting how equipment and other resources (e.g. books, videos) can be made available.
- Routinely involving parents/carers in compiling and reviewing Child's Plans.
- Providing information for parents/carers about specific educational settings which may be appropriate for their child, and arranging for parents/carers to visit these educational settings.

Good Practice Specific to Autism Spectrum Disorders

- Encouraging parents/carers to access parent training programmes, workshops and support groups throughout the Council area.
- Considering and evaluating new developments in the field of Autism Spectrum Disorders.
- Taking into account the views of parents/carers and young people affected by Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Addressing Concerns

It is much easier, quicker and more satisfactory to avoid disputes by involving parents/carers fully in planning for their child from the outset, and by recognising and giving appropriate weight to their perspectives and understanding. The convening of a solution focused meeting to generate solutions is often a powerful way to carry out joint planning. If both parents/carers and school staff are aware of school and Western Isles policy they will be able to understand the steps which are being taken and the support which is being given. Significant disputes, including initiation of the formal appeals procedures under the Additional Support for Learning Act can often be avoided by listening to concerns, responding promptly and taking appropriate action.

Parents/carers and young people who wish to have support at any point can have a supporter or advocate present at meetings and/or discussions.

If a parent/carer expresses concern that appropriate assessment and/or support is not being given to their child, the following processes are recommended:

Stage 1: if the concern is an educational one, then in the first instance parents/carers should be advised to approach the school and to discuss their concerns with (for primary pupils) the Head Teacher or Principal Teacher of Learning Support, and (for secondary pupils) the Principal Teacher for Learning Support. These school staff will ensure that recommended procedures are being adhered to.

Stage 2: a further referral to the Head Teacher may be made to try to achieve a satisfactory solution. The Head Teacher should take responsibility for organising a meeting to try to address parental concerns. Parents/carers may wish to take someone to the meeting in a supportive role.

Stage 3: if all school-based dialogue has been exhausted and a conclusion satisfactory to the parents/carers or young person has not been reached, then the parents/carers or young person have the right to invite the Senior Education Officer (SEO) to investigate. The Head Teacher may wish to request the assistance of the SEO at any stage.

Stage 4: if there is still no satisfactory resolution, parents/carers must be offered access to the procedures introduced by the Additional Support for Learning Act 2004. These procedures can include independent mediation, independent dispute resolution and/or referral to an ASN Tribunal. (Information on these formal processes can be found at enquire.org.uk (Enquire Scotland).

If a serious disagreement occurs, notions of blame should be avoided. All partners, including parents/carers, need to be seen as part of the solution rather than any partner being seen as the cause of the problem.

If for any reason there cannot be active collaboration with parents/carers, special efforts should be made to involve the pupil and other key people in identifying targets and goals, the programmes which will help to achieve these, and the best interests of and long-term aims for the young person.

Autism Spectrum Disorder Friendly School Guidelines

An Autism Spectrum Disorder Friendly school should:

- Understand the 'Triad of Impairment'
- Make sure all teachers are aware of their duties under the Additional Support Needs Code of practice to identify children's needs, including those with Autism.
- Have a key person, who can provide guidance on Autism and ensure that all staff who come into contact with a child with am Autism Spectrum Disorder are aware of the particular needs of that child.
- Encourage staff with knowledge and experience of children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder to share their expertise with other school staff.
- Keep an up-to-date bank of information on Autism which is easily accessible for use by staff and parents (e.g. Autism Education Trust or Autism Toolkit resources).
- Keep up-to-date records of staff Autism Spectrum Disorder training. Make sure that all new staff are given the opportunity to have training.
- Ensure that the whole staff are informed to at least Level 1 – Autism Awareness.
- Make sure a named member of staff or LS teacher who knows about Autism is available to discuss any concerns the child with an Autism Spectrum Disorder may have and help the child to contribute their views as fully as possible to the development of their learning.
- Ensure the curriculum of the child with an Autism Spectrum Disorder is tailored to meet their needs, including the provision of a visual framework necessary to support their understanding.
- Provide opportunities for children and teach them how to generalise skills learned in one setting/lesson to other situations/settings.
- Teach 'transitioning' skills throughout each lesson and daily opportunities to do so (e.g. telling the child 'when we are done with this, then we need to move onto this', etc.).
- Ensure consistency of approaches and recognise the need for predictability for children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- Teach children to understand a range of communications and interactions with others around them.
- Focus on building 'connections' or positive relationships as a key factor, as with all children and young people.
- Recognise that Information and Communication Technology can be a particularly effective medium for children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- Modify the school environment, where possible and appropriate, to take account of the difficulties with sensory stimuli experienced by some children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- Work closely with parents and families, consulting them about the planning process, plans, behaviour protocols etc. and inviting them to join in with Autism Spectrum Disorder training where appropriate.

- Support families by ensuring that out-of-school activities include provision for children with this condition.
- Be aware of and use networks between the Integrated Children's Services across the Western Isles & NHS Western Isles and the voluntary sector so that there is a free flow of information regarding individual children with Autism, and sharing of up-to-date information regarding Autism practice.
- Using the GIRFEC framework, ensure smooth transition between settings within and out with school, by exchanging accurate and up-to-date records, profiles and ways of working with the individual child.
- Ensure planning and preparation for children with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder through all major stages: home to nursery, nursery to P1, P7 to S1, and Secondary to post school.
- Work closely with adult services to ensure a smooth transition to post-16 provision for pupils with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Checklist for an Autism Spectrum Disorder Friendly Classroom

Date:

Use the list below to audit how Autism Friendly your classroom is. In the third column list who you think you would need to include/share in any new strategies adopted and in column four any other strategies that you would like to take forward.

Remember this checklist is to help you. ☺

Provision/Strategy	✓ Well developed	✓Partly developed	Not yet developed
Adults adjust their language (keywords only)			
Children are clear about the structure of the day-Visual timetable on display			
Include structure within unstructured times			
The environment is organised with clear signposts what happens and where			
Variety of visual resources to support teaching, learning and communication			
Individual/generic workstation system			
Variety of concrete objects to support teaching and learning			
Visual instructions/rules in the classroom and around the school			
Appropriate seating (Relatively distraction free for children with an Autism Spectrum			

Provision/Strategy	✓ Well developed	✓Partly developed	Not yet developed
Disorder)			
Independent work area			
Low arousal area of the classroom			
Clear rules that are agreed and displayed			
Instructional language is explicit and framed in positive language			
Time is given to process instructions and questions			
Minimum levels of background noise			
Labelled resources			
Colour coding environment/resources			
Awareness about sensory sensitivity			
Awareness of sensory overload and systems for allowing 'chill out' time			
Awareness of anxiety levels			

Calming activities or objects to reduce anxiety				

Provision/Strategy	✓ If I am aware of and have used / are using	✓Things I need to develop in my classroom	Who do I need to include/ share in strategies	Strategy/Provision I would like to take forward
Awareness of behaviour linked to Autism Spectrum Disorders				
Limit obsessive behaviours and provide alternative strategies				
Awareness and peer support : providing learning to all children about autism spectrum disorders, and peer mentors when child could benefit from this				
Work tasks and rewards linked to special interests				
Links are made to previous learning across the curriculum				
Relevant information is clearly highlighted				
Transition from whole class to				

independent work is clearly signalled with visual/concrete resources to support				
Provision/Strategy	✓ **If I am aware of and have used / are using**	✓**Things I need to develop in my classroom**	**Who do I need to include/ share in strategies**	**Strategy/Provision I would like to take forward**
In some lessons the focus is altered to include teaching of social skills and understanding				
Advance warnings is given of any changes				
Consistent use of strategies				
Activities/tasks are differentiated				