



FLEXIBILITY OF THOUGHT STATEMENT

INTRODUCTION

This document is a statement of approaches to address Flexibility of Thought when working with pupils on the autistic spectrum. This should be read in conjunction with all other policies and guidance with particular reference to the Teaching and learning Policy, The Curriculum Policy, Assessment Policy and Behaviour Policy.

It identifies our aims, objectives and strategies used.

RATIONALE

Flexibility of thought..... ***“allows us to understand and predict other people's behaviour, make sense of abstract ideas, and to imagine situations outside our immediate daily routine”*** (N.A.S. 2008).

We recognise that autistic pupils have difficulty with flexibility of thought. This fundamental component of the DSM-5 diagnostic assessment or, as Wing (1996) refers to as “Triad of Impairment” implies that autistic pupils have difficulty in their development of play and social imagination. Often they do not easily grasp that other people have thoughts and emotions of their own or understand these.

Difficulties with flexibility of thought can manifest itself in obsessive, repetitive routines and behaviours. Autistic people have a strong preference for routines and sameness and find security in rigidity or ritualistic behaviors. These behaviours are not seen as behaviours that always need eliminating, we would only consider this if they were impeding that person’s daily life, safety or education. We would seek to modify the behaviours necessary to the individual.

Autistic pupils may have an impaired ability to use imagination to problem solve and predict outcomes on a day-to-day basis. If anxiety levels are heightened for whatever reason, the ability to make or accept choices, problem solve, make decisions and negotiate may become impaired.

Difficulties with flexibility of thought mean that autistic pupils may find it hard to:

- Understand and interpret other people's thoughts, emotions and actions
- Predict what will happen next, or what could happen next
- Plan for outcomes and consequences
- Recognise the impact of actions, immediate or in the future

- Understand the concept of danger
- Engage in imaginative play and activities: people with autism may enjoy some imaginative play but prefer to act out the same scenes each time
- Prepare for change and plan for the future
- Cope in new or unfamiliar situations
- Generalise skills across different settings
- Multi-task
- Make informed decisions and choice making

These difficulties in flexible thinking represent a major barrier to learning for autistic pupils. As a result, these difficulties may present as:

- Challenging or inappropriate behaviour
- Repetitive behaviours (such as; lining up objects, pacing up and down, repetitive questioning or activities etc)
- An inability to regulate empathy with others
- Limited ability to problem solve
- An inability to accept others' viewpoints
- Restricted play skills
- Withdrawal from unfamiliar people, activities or places
- Obsessive interests
- Reliance on routines and familiarity
- Resistant to change (desire to preserve sameness)
- Poor self and organisational skills
- Difficulties managing unstructured times and transitions
- Limited imitation skills
- Lack of imagination and original thought.
- Rigid perspective on events
- Poor negotiation skills
- Poor self-esteem

Change is a contributing factor to causing anxiety. An autistic person can find any kind of change difficult however significant or insignificant it appears to others. This is often because they do not understand the change or they are unable to predict the outcome of that change. subsequently, this causes fear or anxiety.

There are many changes that require support such as;

- Changing position of (classroom) furniture
- Changing the timetable
- Changing teaching staff
- Eating different foods
- Eating and drinking from different containers
- Wearing different clothing
- Seasonal changes
- Changing traveling routes
- Micro transitions (moving within a small space such as classroom)
- Macro transitions (moving from one place to another such as bus to the classroom)

- Crisis management,
- Environmental changes,
- Change to structure and routine
- Community outings
- Changing boundaries and expectation from others
- Changing behaviours of others

IMPLEMENTATION

We address difficulties with flexibility of thought through various teaching strategies; these strategies are identified and recorded in a variety of formats. Some of the daily teaching techniques are listed below. This however, is not an exclusive list and we will always seek new and other ways to meet individual needs.

DAILY PRACTICE

- Alternative and augmentative communication systems
- Daily timetables and schedules
- Individual schedules
- Choice making boards / choosing time
- First and then boards
- Offering limited choices (this or that)
- Sabotaging events (to encourage problem solving and seeking / accepting alternatives)
- Teaching across different settings to encourage generalisation skills
- Teaching to “**ask for help**” (Help cards)
- Teaching to “**request a break**”, identifying time out, promoting self regulatory behaviour
- Teaching to a “**surprise**” on the timetable (pre planned changes)
- individualised behaviour techniques and management strategies (see behaviour policy)
- Opportunities to **negotiate** throughout the day (let’s make a deal / token boards)
- Building sensory activities into the daily routine to reduce anxiety (e.g. exercise and circuits)
- Teaching **Finished**. (Effective transitions between activities is embedded into daily routines so that unexpected change can be managed)
- Social stories (where relevant)
- Social skills teaching and groups (We are using Alex Kelly’s talkabout series)
- Setting clear and consistent boundaries for the behaviour (limiting frequency of objects / time or place)
- Exploring alternative, more appropriate activities that have the same function as the repetitive behaviour.
- Using ‘special interests’ to motivate and reward so to develop skills, increase social opportunities and improve self esteem.
- Relaxation techniques

SPECIAL INTERESTS

Special interests can provide great motivations for our autistic pupils. We do not view a pupil’s special interest as something we need to eradicate (unless there are H&S reasons) but modify it to a socially accepted behaviour (as a reward or socially).

PLANNING AND RECORDING

- Annual review and person centered review targets
- PLP targets may address the difficulty with flexibility of thought.
- Planning includes acknowledgement of learning of flexible thinking
- Transition plans for pupils during admissions or class changes
- Pen portraits
- Wellbeing (including Behaviour) Plans
- Sensory Activities
- SCERTS Planning and Targets Setting.
- Lego Therapy, Verve Therapy, smiLE Therapy and other named therapies

MONITORING

We ensure that opportunities for developing flexible thinking, choice making and problem solving are pursued and evaluated. This is done through;

- Annual reviews and PCP reviews
- Pupil Progress Meetings
- Classroom Observations
- SCERTS assessment and tracking
- Monitoring Communication Systems
- Quality Assurance Processes
- Social Skills Groups
- Liaison with Multidisciplinary Teams & MAG Teams
- Liaison with Parents, Carers and Pastoral team

LINKS

Flexibility of thought links to all areas of learning across all areas of the curriculum and supports policies such as;

- Behaviour and Physical Intervention Policy
- Teaching and Learning Policy
- Curriculum Policy
- PSHE Policy
- Sensory Statement
- Transition policy
- Autism Handbook

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

In all areas of learning, Staff are committed to promoting equal opportunities and access to all our pupils irrespective of their difficulties, cultures, backgrounds, ethnicity, gender or difference. In every aspect we seek to ensure our pupils are supported through appropriate strategies and resources to access a broad and balanced curriculum and learning experiences relative to their needs and aspirations.

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Policy agreed and ratified	Approved and Signed by Simon Garrill CEO	
	Approved and ratified by Trustees /Chair of Governors	
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