



## Tyssen ARP Communication and Interaction Policy

**This document contains our procedures & guidelines relating to:**

- **Communication**
- **Social Understanding**
- **Flexibility of Thought**

**Our aims are to:**

- Pursue the right of every pupil to have an effective means of communication regardless of their disability.
- Strive for excellence in the field of current total communication practice.
- Work in partnership with parents and carers.
- Empower pupils to make choices and exert control over their environment.
- Ensure carefully managed transitions throughout the school and at key stages of transition to other placements.
- Ensure continuity of provision throughout all classes within the school.
- Keep informed of developments in the rapidly changing field of autism, learning disabilities and Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC).
- Actively foster a total communication environment giving equal status to all methods of communication.
- Provide motivating situations in which pupils can develop their language skills using a total communication approach in meaningful, functional and enjoyable ways both to increase social interaction and to access the curriculum.
- Provide training and advice in all aspects of communication with our pupils with autism.
- Provide effective, high quality multidisciplinary input.
- Inform the wider community about the value of total communication for those with autism.
- Provide opportunities for interaction with peers through effective class peer information sessions and interventions such as Circles of Friends.
- Support children with autism to understand and manage their emotions.
- Monitor and review the effectiveness of this Policy.

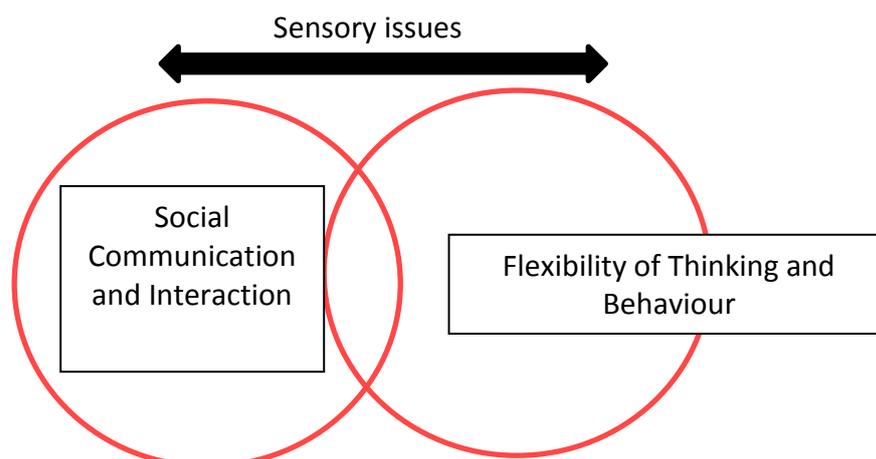
## What is Autism?

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects the way a person communicates and interacts with people around them.

It is often referred to as a 'spectrum' because the strengths and needs of each person with autism varies greatly. **It is important for staff to understand the particular strengths and needs of each pupil they work with in order to support them effectively.**

Although the presentation of autism is different for every person, according to the DSM-V diagnostic criteria every person with autism has needs in two areas, known as the dyad of impairments. Sensory impairments are encompassed in the second:

1. Social communication and interaction.
2. Restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests, or activities.



[The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed.; DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013)]

An understanding of the psychological theories associated with autism is also vital to inform and guide our interactions with our pupils with autism. This includes Theory of Mind, Executive planning difficulties and weak central coherence.

## Co-existing Conditions:

People with autism have an increased likelihood of also having one or more additional learning difficulties such as dyspraxia or attention deficit disorder (with or without hyperactivity). Additional Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCNs) may include speech difficulties (articulatory or phonological), speech

dyspraxia, stammering, difficulties understanding language and difficulties with expressive language.

Most of the pupils at Tyssen with autism have significant accompanying learning difficulties, but whatever their individual level of ability they share a common difficulty in making sense of the world.

All medical conditions will be diagnosed by appropriate professionals from the health services. Assessing the impact of a child's social communication difficulties, and any other co-existing conditions, on his or her ability to access the curriculum should however involve the team of professionals within school.

## **SUPPORTING PUPILS WITH ASD AND THEIR FAMILIES**

Although children's and families' needs will vary, there are a few features that are likely to be important for all the families with whom we work:

- Parents should feel they are able to feed back any concerns they have to the school and vice versa, so it is important that the staff seem approachable and open.
- Schools should be able to respond to the varying needs of children with autism. They should be aware that the approaches which work for one child may not work for another and that flexibility is crucial.
- Careful and consistent planning is vital for children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), as mixed messages can cause them acute anxiety. Communication between staff, which can ensure a consistent approach to teaching and supporting pupils with autism, is as important as the school communicating effectively with parents.

(NAS, 2008)

## **STRATEGIES**

In Tyssen ARP staff are aware of and use a variety of approaches and strategies to support pupils including:

**SCERTS Model:** The SCERTS<sup>®</sup> Model is a research-based educational approach and multidisciplinary framework that directly addresses the core challenges faced by children with ASD and related disabilities, and their families. SCERTS<sup>®</sup> focuses on building competence in Social Communication, Emotional Regulation and Transactional Supports. It is applicable for individuals with a wide range of abilities and ages across home, school and community settings.

In Tyssen ARP, SCERTS contributes to our assessment, monitoring and planning processes. Video examples, with the generous consent of parents of a Tyssen ARP pupil, have contributed to national SCERTS training by Emily Rubin (USA).

**TEACCH:** (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication Handicapped Children) principles. TEACCH focuses on providing a clear and structured learning environment so pupils can complete work as independently as possible. Structured is provided through the use of, for example, visual timetables, timers, and 'finished' baskets.

**Intensive Interaction:** This is a practical approach for teaching the pre-speech fundamentals of communication to people who have severe learning difficulties and/or autism and who are still at an early stage of communication development. The approach begins with observation: What is the child doing?; What are they focusing on? What the communication partner is trying to do is shift the child's attention from solitary self-stimulation to shared activity (Phoebe Caldwell, 2010).

**Talking Mats:** 'Talking Mats' is an established communication tool which uses a mat with pictures or symbols attached as the basis for communication. It is designed to help people with communication difficulties to think about issues discussed with them, and provide them with a way to effectively express their opinion. Talking Mats can help people arrive at a decision by providing a structure where information is presented in small chunks supported by symbols. It gives people time and space to think about information, work out what it means and say what they feel in a visual way that can be easily recorded. (*AAC Research Unit, University of Stirling*)

**Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC):** Pupil's at Tyssen ARP are able to use a variety of methods in order to communicate. This includes the use of low and high tech AAC devices such as:

- **Makaton.** This is a signing and symbol system which is used alongside spoken language to help pupils communicate. All ARP staff are expected to use Makaton signing in order to support pupil's understanding of spoken language. Some pupils may also use signing to express themselves.
- **Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS).** This is a communication system whereby a child is taught to communicate by giving the adult a card with a picture on it. It begins by teaching the child to exchange a picture for something they want, such as a drink. Staff in Tyssen ARP have been trained in the use of PECS.
- **Core vocabulary boards.** This is a communication system in which children are supported to communicate using a series of core words on a board across a range of different sessions. These are words like 'help', 'look', 'more', 'stop', etc. Core words are the words that young children start using very early on, and therefore are the type of words that can be used to further extend a pupil's communication. All staff in the ARP are trained in this approach.

- **High tech AAC device.** There are a range of apps currently implemented onto high tech devices. These apps have a wide vocabulary on it and the child can press the word(s) they want to say in order to communicate with others. It can be helpful for those pupils who are either non-verbal or whose speech is largely unintelligible. The choice of app is individualised to the child.

A pupil's AAC device should be available for them to use throughout the day as it is their voice. **A pupil's AAC device should NEVER be removed for disciplinary reasons as to do so it is to take away their voice.**

A named member of staff should be responsible for ensuring the AAC device is available to pupils throughout the day and that it is kept up to date. This named person should also ensure any high tech devices are charged and ready for use. School staff should liaise with a Speech and Language Therapist about how to use and update various AAC devices.

All staff share responsibility for good, responsive communication with the pupil using an AAC device, as well as for ensuring the device's security (see iPad Security Policy).

**Personal Communication Passports:** These record important information about a pupil in an accessible and person-centred way. They contain essential information such as a pupil's likes and dislikes, their strengths and their needs as well as their sensory sensitivities. Communication passports ensure all staff have a basic understanding of each pupil's individual profile. All staff should read each pupil's communication passport and help keep them up to date to reflect how pupils have changed. Communication passports can also be used to support transitions between settings (e.g. when moving to secondary school).

**Visual Supports:** This includes pictures, photos, videos, objects, written words, or a combination of these. The symbol software system 'Communicate in Print' is used in Tyssen to make visual supports. There are other symbol systems available and it should not be assumed in every case that the Communicate in Print symbol is the most appropriate – if in doubt advice should be sought from the ARP's Speech and Language Therapist.

Visual supports can be used for many reasons including:

- Making the day more predictable and preparing pupils for any changes. For example, through the use of visual timetables (see document called 'Visual Timetables in Tyssen ARP' for more information).
- Supporting pupil's to understand the work set. Many people with autism are thought to be visual learners, so presenting information in a visual way can support them with processing information.
- Supporting pupil's in being able to request mutual regulation (support) when they are feeling overwhelmed. This may include asking to go for a walk, a break or for help.

Environmental visual supports should be standardised throughout the classrooms and other school areas.

Staff should save all visuals which they create in a shared area on the school's computer system so everyone can access them.

**Objects of Reference:** An object of reference is an object acting as a cue that will be presented to the child in order to indicate the start of a forthcoming activity, to make choices or sequence events of the day. Objects of reference are used for those pupils who are at the earliest stages of communication or for those for whom an object is more motivating than other communication systems. The speech & language therapist's assessment with the *ComFor: Forerunner in Communication* will guide the whole staff team as to which level of sense-making the child is able to use the objects (assembling level, up to representational level).

**Reduced spoken language:** Children with autism can find it incredibly hard to make sense of the school environment. However, the school environment can be adapted to make everything less confusing and anxiety-provoking. This includes reducing our level of spoken language. It is very important that lessons and activities are carried out in a calm environment, as free as possible from distracting background noises or an excess of spoken language. Children also need to be given plenty of *time* to process what has been said and shown.

**Social interaction and social communication programmes:** This includes –

- **Social Stories™:** A Social Story™ describes a situation and common responses in a specifically defined style and format. The goal of a Social Story™ is to share accurate social information, in a patient and reassuring manner that is easily understood by the pupil. Social Stories™ should not be used as a punishment for challenging or inappropriate behaviour. Although the goal of a Social Story™ should never be to change the individual's behaviour, an individual's improved understanding of events and expectations may lead to more effective responses (*Carol Gray*).
- **Comic Strip Conversations:** Comic strip conversations are a technique developed by Carol Gray to help people with autism develop greater social understanding. Comic strip conversations provide visual representations of the different levels of communication that take place in a conversation, using symbols, stick figure drawings and colour. By seeing the different elements of a conversation presented visually, some of the more abstract aspects of social communication (such as recognising the feelings and intentions of others) are made more 'concrete' and are therefore easier to understand. Comic strip conversations can also offer an insight into how a person with autism perceives a situation.

**SPELL:** SPELL stands for Structure, Positive, Empathy, Low arousal and Links. SPELL is complimentary to other approaches described above, notably TEACCH. Further details can be found at [www.autism.org.uk/spell](http://www.autism.org.uk/spell).

**Circles of Friends:** This may be set up with peer's from a focus pupil's mainstream class in order to help them have higher levels of contact with these peers, and benefit from all the peer social communication and interaction that comes with this.

### **CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (See also School policy)**

Training should be provided for all staff delivering both specific ASD interventions and other interventions from which our pupils with ASD and learning disability will benefit. Training should include issues related to understanding ASD and not be limited to single intervention training.

It is the responsibility of the school to seek and provide training on ASD, both within Hackney Learning Trust and externally.

Weekly INSET meetings led by Speech and Language Therapists provide opportunities for staff to debrief from challenging situations and to apply our learning to our everyday practice.

### **WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP**

#### **Multi-disciplinary and multi-agency working**

Since autism is a developmental disorder, the child's and family's needs will change with age. Professionals need to maintain family contact over time through suitable team members. More intensive work involving a variety of professionals may be needed at different stages in the child's development.

Our pupils in Tyssen ARP benefit from the involvement of professionals from health, education, Social Services, representatives from the voluntary sector, and parent representatives. Parents are integral to the pupil's education and a coordinated programme of intervention should be discussed with the family. The multi-disciplinary team at the school includes Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Educational Psychologists and school nurses.

The following support is available through Hackney services:

- Hackney Parent Partnership Services
- Short Breaks
- Hit Squad
- Advocacy and Interpreting Services

Support locally may include access to a social worker, GP or community nurse.

The Child and Adolescent Mental health Service (CAMHS) may be involved with some of our pupils from time to time.

The Child and Family Consultation Service (CFCS) provides a Clinical Psychology Service for families.

## **WORKING TOWARDS CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE SERVICES**

Many of our pupils are from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. Pupils with autism from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities face a double discrimination which makes their educational experience consistently harder than that of their white British peers, according to the National Autistic Society.

In Tyssen ARP we are working towards providing culturally appropriate intervention programmes and family support. When thinking about our pupils' communication and interaction skills, we need to be thoughtful of our pupils' cultural background. For example, our choice of symbols or signs should be culturally appropriate; cultural differences in social interaction should be taken into account.

Most of our pupils come from bilingual homes. Every effort should be made to provide Interpreting & Advocacy support whenever this is required for parents. As far as practicable the Interpreter/Advocate should come from outside the school environment and there should not be over-reliance on a sibling or other family member to interpret or translate for parents. We will support the use of the family's home language. (See *Guide to Using Interpreter Advocacy Services*)

## **ELICITING PUPIL VIEWS**

The views of the pupils are elicited at each Annual Review and at other times throughout the school year as appropriate. Tyssen ARP adopts good practice in eliciting pupils' views through the use of 'Talking Mats', 'drawing', 'observations' and 'written likes and dislikes'.

Within Annual Reviews, the child's views are embedded in their Education, Health and Care plan (EHC Plan). This is to ensure that the needs of the child or young person are resourced and delivered in what is known as a person centred way. 'Talking Mats' and other resources will help contribute toward an evidence-based means for eliciting pupil views.