

ROMAN FIELDS'

## AUTISM APPROACH



**This policy was revised in January 2017 in consultation with staff, young people, parents and the Management Committee.**

**It was ratified by the Management Committee in February 2017.**

**REVIEW: This policy will be reviewed in response to legislation updates.**

## **AUTISM APPROACH**

### **Introduction:**

The approach to Autism awareness at Roman Fields complies with the nine protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010 as referred to in the Provision's Equality and Diversity Statement.

Young people at Roman Fields have an EHC plan. Almost 70% (January 2017) of our young people also have a diagnosis of an autistic spectrum condition, the primary characteristics of which are as follows;

- Difficulties in non-verbal and verbal communication, social understanding and social behaviour
- Thinking and behaving flexibly (rigidity of thought) according to the situation
- Sensory perception and responses.

Young people with an ASC commonly experience unusual sensitivity to sound, touch and visual stimuli. Reference to 'a spectrum' of difficulties is made because there is a change in their needs over the years of an individual's development and their difficulties vary.

This policy document sets out the provision's aims, principles and strategies for the education of our young people with an autistic spectrum condition. It will form the basis for the development of autism-specific practice in the school over the next two years.

### **Rationale**

In order to ensure that young people on the autistic spectrum are able to access the broad, balanced and relevant curriculum offered to young people throughout our provision, the additional difficulties characteristic of young people on the autistic spectrum need to be taken into account. This includes the school environment, planning, teaching and learning objectives.

### **Aims**

To ensure the following key principles underpin our practice to enable us to provide the best possible education for young people with an autistic spectrum condition.

- Knowledge and understanding of autistic spectrum condition throughout Roman Fields
- Knowledge, understanding and implementation of established interventions and approaches
- Knowledge and understanding of general and specific behaviours and behaviour management approaches
- Roman Fields staff are kept up to date with current research relating to the education and wellbeing of young people with an autistic spectrum condition
- Provisions of young people on the autistic spectrum are continuously monitored and evaluated as part of the self-evaluation process

- Provision of a low arousal environment
- Provision of individual, bespoke learning programmes
- Provision that incorporates individual's special interests and strengths
- Provision that develops the young person understanding of their ASC.

### **Equal Opportunities and inclusion**

Young people with an autistic spectrum condition may be taught in classrooms in an environment that is welcoming and autism friendly on a 1:1, or small group basis. They are encouraged to access education at other settings where they can be sent following careful planning, often accompanied by a tutor from Roman Fields. The decision as to where a young person is placed and their degree of inclusion will be based upon individual need; which is assessed and agreed with parents/carers at Annual or Interim Review.

### **Environment**

Many young people with an autistic spectrum condition have sensory difficulties which can result in unusual or uncomfortable perception of sound, sense, touch, sight and smell. This means that many young people are unable to focus upon teaching activities and are distracted by noise and visual or other stimuli. This has a profound effect upon their ability to learn and impacts behaviour when sensory input causes extreme discomfort or pain. Pupils on the autistic spectrum also have difficulties with flexibility and require clear visual support to understand routines and expectations. Therefore we try to reduce environmental anxiety and distress by the following:

- Providing an environment which is calm, distraction free and has a low level of visual and auditory stimulus
- Providing young people with a high degree of visual and physical structure
- Providing young people with a means of requesting a break from the lesson when their levels of anxiety become raised.

### **Approaches and Interventions**

The teaching philosophy at Roman Fields embodies the rationale of the SPELL approach developed by the National Autistic Society (SPELL stands for **Structure, Positive** (approaches and expectations), **Empathy, Low arousal, Links**); provision of a structured, positive, empathic and low-arousal environment with good links between Roman Fields, home and outside agencies. However, in order to meet the needs of all young people across the spectrum we use an eclectic mix of established and researched approaches and interventions; drawing on best practice and continuously monitoring and evaluating their use.

### **Assessment**

All young people are assessed regularly. Assessment outcomes are reported at Annual Review.

## **Curriculum**

Underpinning all teaching and learning is an emphasis on the development of independence, social interaction, social understanding and social communication.

Lessons are planned to facilitate development in these areas but specific teaching, for example in social skills, life skills and sensory desensitisation are also necessary. We believe in providing many 'real life' opportunities, for example, educational visits are used to help reduce rigidity, develop appropriate social skills such as waiting in shops or having snack in a café and learning about road safety. Young people all access a full differentiated curriculum, delivered in a way that addresses the triad of impairment and sensory issues.

## **Behaviour**

Behaviour is often a means of communication and we endeavour to understand the function behind the behaviour. Specific strategies are used to reduce anxiety and promote feelings of well-being, modify unwanted behaviours and promote more appropriate ones. All staff are trained to use positive handling. Roman Fields has chosen to use the Herts STEPS approach as part of a holistic approach to positively manage behaviour. The values enshrined in the STEPS training model are entirely consistent with the ethos of the school. STEPS training is designed to provide a consistent approach to behaviour management, working with all classroom staff, teachers, leadership and management to actively eliminate restraint.

## **Continuity of Approach**

We recognise the importance of generalising the skills that young people learn at Roman Fields and home. Tutors regularly liaise with multi-disciplinary teams, parents and carers to ensure continuity of approaches in and out of Roman Fields.

## **Training**

Staff are also trained in autism-specific practices and interventions. All of our teaching staff has attended internal training on autism-awareness and good practice.

## **Monitoring and Evaluation**

At Roman Fields we have a robust evaluation programme that is led by individual young people. We liaise closely with the Advisory Teacher of ASC from the Communication Disorder Team, to ensure our approaches are current and reflect the individuals and their diverse learning styles. We also have a designated teacher who leads our autism training and the sharing of good practice in the provision and is responsible for evaluating performance and driving performance towards our shared goals.