



Lawns Park Primary School and Nursery

A Quick Guide to Autism

What is Autism?

Autism is a neurodivergent type of brain; it is a lifelong neurodevelopmental difference that affects how people perceive, communicate, and interact with the world. To be identified as Autistic, the individual will have differences in 3 key areas: social communication and understanding; flexibility, information processing and understanding; sensory processing and integration.

There is no 'typical' autistic person. Every autistic individual has their own strengths, differences, interests, and needs. This is because autism is considered a spectrum. **The autism spectrum is not linear from high ('functioning') to low ('functioning')** but represents the spiky profile of the individual's strengths and challenges.

Autism should always be seen as a difference not a deficit. Autistic people may have different communication styles and ways of processing information, but this is not 'lesser' than a non-autistic person's and these styles should be recognised and valued. Sensory differences can include hyper (high) or hypo (low) sensitivity in relation to the eight senses. These differences will vary from person to person and can actually fluctuate in their responsiveness depending on several different factors for example the time of day, stress levels, tiredness, or the environment.

Implications for a pupil

Many autistic adults and children often state that **it is not their autism that creates barriers as such, but the expectations and responses they have from neurotypical (non-autistic) people.** In particular, the expectation to act, respond and learn in the same way as others.

It should come as no surprise that many autistic children and young people experience anxiety at school. Some pupils hide or mask their anxiety, which can have a seriously detrimental impact on their mental and emotional health, and some of them try to gain as much control as possible in order to create a predictable and safe environment. School is the place where they are going to experience increased uncertainty, the most people, the most potential change, and the least amount of control. They must go to school day after day with little choice about who they may have to interact with, what they might have to do, what changes they might experience and how long

things might last. It is, therefore, vital that all adults understand the individual pupil's strengths and needs and make reasonable adjustments to remove barriers to inclusion and learning.

How to help – top tips

1. Know and understand the pupil; seek and act upon their views, feelings and perceptions using supportive systems like: Pupil Voice Mats; Sensory Checklists; Rating Scales; Observations.
2. Listen to parents/carers; their insight and experience should inform and enhance practice in your setting.
3. Ensure **all** members of your community have at least a basic awareness/understanding of autism. Complete the **AET Making Sense of Autism Training** for everyone in your setting (90 minutes and free, delivered by STARS in person or virtually or download a recorded version from Leeds for Learning) <https://www.leedsforlearning.co.uk/>
4. Increase the range of visual support systems in place to enhance independence, understanding, engagement and well-being.
5. Audit your settings sensory environment and adjust, where possible, in response to needs.
6. Proactively support the pupil's social knowledge and understanding, and inclusion; don't expect them to behave in a neurotypical way but support them to navigate the complex social world and support their peers to understand and value difference.
7. Build in recuperation/chill-out times during the day.
8. Ensure key information about the autistic pupil; their strengths, interests and needs is shared with all staff working with them in a one-page **Individual provision Map** or **Pupil Passport**.

Further advice and support

Useful Websites:

[Spectrum Gaming Autism Understood](#)

STARS Requests for Support- Setting Support and individual autistic pupils.

[One SEND Request](#)

[STARS Introduction to.. Guides](#)

National Autistic Society:

<https://www.autism.org.uk/>

Autism Education Trust:

www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk

Reading: Martian in the Playground: Clare Sainsbury