



HEDGEWOOD SCHOOL

Autism Policy

September 2025

AUTISM POLICY

This policy should be read in conjunction with other school policies including:

Teaching for Learning Policy, Communication Policy, PSHCE Policy, Behaviour, Wellbeing and Safety Policy, Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, Assessment and Recording Policy, Sensory Policy, Whole School Curriculum Policy, SEN Policy and Plan, Supporting Pupils with Medical Conditions Policy and Health and Safety Policy.

Introduction

Pupils at Hedgewood School have an Educational Health and Care Plan that reflects their learning difficulties and most of them also have a diagnosis of Autism.

Pupils with Autism experience differences in the following areas:

- Social Communication
- Social Interaction and relationships
- Functional skills and Independence
- Patterns of behaviour, activities and interests – these can often be restricted and repetitive, but account is taken of preferences and interests as a foundation for personalised learning
- Sensory Experiences
- Emotional regulation and feelings of overwhelm

This policy document sets out the school's aims, principles and strategies for the education of autistic pupils at Hedgewood School.

Hedgewood will respond to the needs of its autistic population and ensure plans are in place that will form part of the annual School Development Plan. These will focus on:

- Ensuring a strengths based approach which, while addressing pupils needs and barriers to learning and wellbeing, incorporates autistic pupils' strengths interests and preferences to provide meaningful experiences which directly promotes well-being.
- Increasing the extent to which autistic pupils can participate in the school curriculum to support their well-being and engagement; including how staff understand and engage with pupils and their individual profiles, highlighting the importance of building rapport with pupils and involving them in decisions about their educational experiences.
- Improving the physical environment of school to increase the extent to which pupils can take advantage of education and associated services, including making adaptations which promote engagement in play and social opportunities where desired, and adaptations support autistic pupils well-being and engagement.

The School Development Plan (SDP) will be reviewed and revised regularly and be available for inspection by any interested parties at reasonable times. The Co-Headteachers, in consultation with staff, pupils, students, parents and any other relevant party will devise the SDP.

Rationale

To ensure that autistic pupils receive support that is uniquely tailored to their individual needs to be able to access the broad, balanced and relevant curriculum pathway offered throughout the school. That pupils' differences, characteristics and strengths are taken into account in all aspects of school life, including the school environment, planning, teaching and learning objectives. The emphasis is on communication, social interaction and the independence and emotional well-being of each individual pupil.

Hedgewood School actively engages in National Autistic Society's Autism Accreditation Specialist Award, currently holding Advanced Accreditation. This process ensures the school is actively engaging in a quality assurance programme, that ultimately supports school to deliver a person-centred educational experience which involves the young autistic person's well-being being at the heart of what we do, and where their voice is captured in as meaningful a way as possible to help shape the provision.

Aims

To ensure that the following key principles underpin our practice to provide the best possible educational outcomes for our autistic pupils:

- Knowledge and understanding of autism throughout the school
- Knowledge, understanding and implementation of positive behaviour management strategies, including supporting levels of regulation
- Updating and training of staff on current and new research and evidence based practice relating to the education and well-being of autistic pupils
- Provide a positive environment where autistic pupils experience activities that are meaningful to them and provides them with a sense of achievement and purpose.
- Provide an individualized approach to pupil learning which takes account of strengths and areas of challenge
- Continuous monitoring and evaluation of provision and support for pupils
- To provide relevant interventions that respond to changing pupil need

Environment and Sensory Needs

Many pupils with autism experience sensory differences which can result in distortions in their perceptions of sound, sight, touch, smell, taste, movement and their inner body feelings (interoception). They may also experience difficulties with their proprioceptive and vestibular senses. These can have a profound effect on both their ability to engage with learning and their emotional regulation.

We aim to reduce the impact of these difficulties by:

- Using the SPELL framework to address the physical environment and teaching approaches that increases capacity and accessibility for autistic to learn more effectively and promotes a sense of well-being and enjoyment.
- Providing an environment which is calm and distraction free with as low a level of visual and auditory stimulus as possible.
- Provide opportunities for sensory feedback within the classrooms through sensory boxes and personalized sensory supports based on individual children's needs.
- Providing pupils with a high degree of visual and physical structures, adapting classroom environments for the needs of individual children
- Providing children with strategies they can use when their levels of anxiety are rising and /or they experience feelings of overwhelm.
- Ensure staff have a deep understanding of a range of approaches and tools to support autistic pupils in regulating sensory input.

Consequently, buildings will be audited in line with SPELL to ensure acoustics, lighting, smells, signage and classroom organization, are calm and ordered in such a way to reduce anxiety and aid concentration. In accessing the curriculum, autistic pupils and pupils with additional sensory and/or physical disabilities, will have full access to all areas, provided at a suitable level and differentiated according to need.

Approaches and Interventions

Hedgewood School aims to incorporate the rationale of the SPELL approach developed by the National Autistic Society into its practice by providing a structured, positive, empathetic and low arousal environment, all resulting in positive levels of regulation for pupils, with good links between home and outside agencies.

However, in order to understand and respond to the needs of all autistic pupils, a mix of approaches and interventions are in use, firmly embedded in a person centered approach that puts the strengths, interests and preferences at the core of support.

Approaches are evidenced based and commonly used within the autism practices but ultimately always personalized to each individual's profile of strengths and challenges. There are some clear definitions in approaches and protocols used within certain curriculum phases at Hedgewood, but all compliment the stage of learning of each autistic pupil and allow for movement between pathways as each pupil's interest and need is identified. These approaches are continuously monitored and evaluated to ensure best practice.

A transdisciplinary approach which integrates therapy and education includes, but are not limited to, the following approaches;

- Speech Therapy
- Occupational Therapy
- Physiotherapy
- TEACCH
- Applied Behaviour Analysis
- PCS (picture communication systems), including communication belts
- Symbol use
- Signalong
- Communication Aids
- Essentials for Living 'Necessary Nine' skills
- Verbal Behaviour Milestones Assessment and Placement Programme
- Intensive Interaction
- Zones of Regulation
- The Alert Programme
- Sensory circuit/diets/ sensory Integration
- Attention Autism
- Positive Behaviour Support
- Prevent-Teach-Reinforce behavior-function based intervention to support behaviors of concern
- Studio 3/Low Arousal techniques

Communication

Communication underpins all learning and hence is considered a key area of development for all pupils. The school uses a 'Total Communication Approach' using signing, symbols, photographs, high and low tech communication aids and objects of reference as appropriate to individual pupil's needs to provide clear communication where they are non-speakers.

Pupils will be supported to develop an effective method of communication through our commitment to our 'Speakers Initiative', where every child has a vocal profile assessment and a preferred method of communication is established. The aim is to ensure all pupils have a method of communication that is **C**ontinuously **A**vailable, **F**requently used and **E**ffortless (CAFÉ).

Pupils communication goals will focus on understanding and use of any appropriate forms of communication to ensure their needs, wants and opinions are communicated and understood, and their well-being is therefore enhanced. Opportunities will be planned for development of social communication skills and social understanding. This will be achieved through adult modelling and mirroring, individual pupil communication targets devised through a transdisciplinary approach to include Speech and Language therapy and our communication friendly environment in supporting autistic pupils across the school.

All staff at Hedgewood will be active 'listeners', sensitively attuned to understanding the communication of autistic young people and committed to enabling increased appropriate communication through each individual pupil's preferred communication means. Early identification of a child's preferred method of communication is key to determining appropriate access to learning opportunities and reduction of frustration.

Curriculum

At Hedgewood, our curriculum develops pupils' **communication, independence, critical learning behaviours, and functional life skills.**

Our aims are to maximise the extent to which autistic pupils can participate in the school curriculum. This will not only cover teaching and learning but the wider curriculum such as participation in after school clubs, leisure, sporting and cultural activities or school visits. Outdoor learning is an integral part of the school day where pupils have opportunity to have their sensory needs met through planned physical play and engagement activities which offer movement and sensory feedback. Clearly designated play areas both in and outside the classroom offers provision to meet communication and social interaction skills.

We use a variety of approaches when planning and delivering the curriculum to draw upon the different strengths and aptitudes of pupils. This might include using flexible grouping arrangements where autistic pupils can work with their peers, and encouraging peer support. Many early learners will benefit from direct skills teaching with familiar keyworkers to work towards independence in daily living skills, and others will be taught through active learning opportunities.

Our **four curriculum phases**, are tailored to individual needs—whether pupils are working on early developmental skills or accessing the National Curriculum at an appropriate level. This phased approach ensures targeted teaching, with flexibility to move children across phases as their needs change.

THE HEDGEWOOD CURRICULUM				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal Learning Plans Addressing individual barriers to learning 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal Learning Plans Addressing individual barriers to learning 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Therapeutic input to learning Safeguarding
Pre-Phase 1	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Whole-School Curriculum
Baseline Assessments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preference Assessments Necessary Nine Skills Vocal Profile Curriculum Assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early Steps Implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Skills Teaching PLP focused Functional Skills Direct Intervention End Point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scoring 3 and 4 on NS skills Generalised to 2 people across 2 settings Tolerate Parallel play and learning Self Occupy for 20 minutes 	Baseline Assessments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preference Assessments Necessary Nine Skills Vocal Profile VB MaPP Curriculum Assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early Steps Implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning through Play Focused/Active Learning Parallel Learning End Point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scoring 3 and 4 on NS skills Working within Level 2 of the VB MaPP Working alongside others Emerging foundational subject knowledge 	Baseline Assessments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> VB MaPP Autism Progress Curriculum Assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progression Steps Implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning through Play Focused Learning (Focus: Curricular) Active Learning (focus: PLP) Paired Learning End Point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete the VB MaPP (exception: Reading, Writing and Maths) Work in pairs and small groups Developing subject knowledge across the curriculum 	Curriculum Assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progression Steps Pre-Key Stage Standards Relevant statutory assessments Implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapted Formal Learning I do, We do, You do Group Learning Intervention catch-up 	Phonics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taught through Bug Club English <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading Writing Spoken Language Maths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taught through White Rose Maths Science <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taught through White Rose Science Computing & Online Safety <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taught through Raspberry Pi PSHE & PE Music <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taught through Jigsaw Music Taught through Charanga Art DT PE Geography History R.E.
Functional		Formal		

Every child has a **Personal Learning Plan (PLP)**, shaped by their Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and ongoing evidence-based assessments. We use a range of assessments to help identify and understand the specific challenges our pupils face in their learning. These tools support us in recognising individual needs and enable us to plan targeted support to help pupils build learning to learn skills specifically for communication and interaction. The outcomes of these assessments are used to inform each child's Personal Learning Plan (PLP), ensuring that

their learning remains purposeful, personalised, and focused on key areas of development. The PLP targets are linked directly to EHCP outcomes. Parents and carers are key partners in this process, working with teachers to achieve the best outcomes.

Behaviour

Hedgewood School has adopted the principles of Positive Behaviour Support that seeks to discover the function or communicative intent behind behaviours of concern. We utilise the STUDIO 3, Low arousal approach which is a non-aversive approach to managing behaviours of concern where the focus is on identifying factors which affect behaviour and managing change over time.

The principles of positive reward and the teaching of new skills including communication are key to managing this change. It emphasises community presence, choice participation, and a person-centred approach to managing behaviours.

For many autistic people, seemingly incidental environmental factors will greatly increase stress levels, potentially leading to challenging behaviour and reducing their opportunity for learning. Response to these challenges for pupils is part of our use of NAS SPELL approach and a key motivator to identifying the appropriate curriculum phase according to pupils needs. Our sensory policy reflects our approach to ensuring young people can access sensory supports and feedback which enables sensory regulation to aid learning and also offers pleasurable and necessary sensory for pupils.

For some pupils an individual risk assessment (RA) is necessary to assist in the management of anxiety and related behaviours. A pupil's individual risk assessment details identified functions/triggers and risk reduction techniques, including proactive and reactive strategies, for all staff working with the pupil to follow. This is shared with parents, staff and appropriate professionals involved with the provision of services to the young person with autism.

Individual pupil risk assessments merge Studio 3, and Prevent- Teach- Reinforce strategies and ethos, focusing on an overall Low Arousal approach for our pupils. De-escalation strategies identify proactive strategies which may include, likes/dislikes/motivators, sensory needs; and Social Communication, Emotional Regulation, Transactional Supports.

Positive Behaviour Support Plans (PBS plans) supersede individual risk assessments when a pupils challenging behaviour significantly hinders their access to learning and social opportunities, and has a negative impact on their quality of life. Positive Behaviour Support Plans and Risk Assessments are co-produced by the PBS lead, class team, therapists and members of the school's transdisciplinary team. We share relevant information and work closely with local support services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS LD).

Assessment

We value every small step as progress. Our rigorous assessment system ensures learning is meaningful and personal. Teachers follow the “**Assess, Plan, Do, Review**” cycle, ensuring provision evolves to meet changing needs.

We assess pupil learning using Connecting Steps, a programme that allows us to track progress over time in a way that reflects each child's individual journey. Connecting Steps aligns with our Curriculum Maps to ensure that teaching and assessment reflect each other with coherence and continuity. Children in Pre-Phase 1 and Phase 1 are assessed against Early Steps, while those in Phase 2 and Phase 3 are assessed against Progression Steps. Teachers input assessment data into Connecting Steps every half-term, allowing us to monitor progress closely, inform planning, and respond promptly to pupils' emerging needs.

We use a range of assessments to help identify and understand the specific challenges our pupils face in their learning. These tools support us in recognising individual needs and enable us to plan targeted support to help pupils build learning to learn skills specifically for communication and interaction.

	Pre-Phase 1 and Phase 1	Phase 2 and Phase 3
Curriculum Maps	Working from Early Years to Adapted National Curriculum	
Curriculum Assessment	Early Steps	Progression Steps
Unique Learning Barriers assessment	Necessary 9 and VB <u>MaPP</u>	VB <u>MaPP</u> and Autism Progress

The outcomes of these assessments are used to inform each child's Personal Learning Plan (PLP), ensuring that their learning remains purposeful, personalised, and focused on key areas of development. The PLP targets are linked directly to EHCP outcomes.

Personal Curriculum Plans (PLP) are set and twice a year. Assessment against EHCP outcomes are reported at mid-year review Annual Review and at the end of the academic year.

Many pupil achievements relating to ability to manage sensory input, development of self – reliance and independence, and levels of regulation and understanding of own and other's emotions are planned for, and assessed in contributing to positive outcomes for each autistic individual.

Teachers record learning using **Seesaw** Online Learning Journeys, giving parents real-time updates through photos, videos, and comments. This provides valuable recording of pupil's achievements in different contexts.

Training

All staff attend internal training on autism – awareness and autism specific practices /interventions such as the use of symbols for communication, building rapport, TEACCH, sensory integration issues and Studio 3/Positive Behaviour Support.

All staff undergo training from the Autism Education Trust Framework (AET). Training is refreshed and developed to include new research and best practice to include interventions such as Attention Autism, Intensive Interaction, NAS Earlybird +, Signing and understanding environmental factors on pupils with autism.

Bespoke training is implemented to reflect the specific needs of individual pupils in a class or year group team.

There is continuous monitoring and evaluation of the training provision to ensure best practice and positive outcomes for all pupils.

Working with parents and other professionals

Hedgewood is committed to working with parents and other professionals to increase positive outcomes for young people with autism. Our integrated services, including Speech and Language and Occupational Therapy at Hedgewood are delivered to maximise impact on learning and progress in core skills relevant to each child's needs. Through a transdisciplinary approach and focused direct class support from the therapy team, children's programmes are addressed as an ongoing part of their learning, improving access to their appropriate curriculum provision.

Parents and carers are encouraged to contribute to the work of the school and to feel welcome in every area of activity. As part of this partnership there is a positive and productive partnership between the home and school including training, work with the Family Support Team, and community focus to include coffee afternoons, and regular parent open evening meetings. A strong partnership will be promoted between parents/carers and professionals, with effective liaisons to share aims and to work co-operatively together to ensure best interests of pupils.

Hedgewood liaises with a range of professionals, including Educational Psychologists, Intensive Behaviour Support Services (CAHMS LD), to promote positive outcomes for pupils.

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Hedgewood hosts a range of other professionals such as nursing and Initial Teacher Training (ITT) students to develop awareness of autism and understanding of strategies to support people with autism in different contexts in the community.

Hedgewood School is committed to supporting pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) across our local community. We recognise the challenges that mainstream schools may encounter when supporting pupils with autism and complex needs. In response to this, we have established a structured, tiered Outreach Program designed to provide school staff with the necessary professional development, insights, and practical strategies to support these learners effectively.

Our Outreach Program is grounded in evidence-based practice and current research across the fields of Autism, Communication, Behaviour, and Sensory Needs. Each support package is tailored to the specific needs of the individual school and its pupils.

We draw upon the expertise of our multidisciplinary team, including members of the Senior Leadership Team, our Board Certified Behaviour Analyst, Positive Behaviour Support Lead, Speech and Language Therapist, and Occupational Therapist. This collaborative approach ensures that all feedback, training, and recommendations are informed by professional best practice.

We offer In-reach opportunities for staff working with autistic pupils in mainstream settings to come into Hedgewood and spend time observing autism practice in action and have opportunity to benefit from staff expertise.

Hedgewood School is the Hillingdon Hub for the AET, providing support to other educational professionals in supporting autistic persons across a variety of educational settings.

