



# Teaching and Learning Policy

Ratified Date:	2 <sup>nd</sup> March 2020
Signed:	
	Lynne Thornton – Chair of Governors
Review Date:	1 <sup>st</sup> March 2021

## REVIEW SHEET

The information in the table below provides details of the earlier versions of this document and brief details of reviews and, where appropriate amendments which have been made to later versions.

<b>Version Number</b>	<b>Version Description</b>	<b>Date of Revision</b>
1	Original	March 2020

***“The quality of learning in all its forms is the most important aspect of the school and the quality of teaching is one of the most important factors contributing to this”.***

## **Rationale**

Cumbria Academy for Autism (CAA) is a Free School Academy that caters for students with Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) aged currently between 6 and 15. At CAA we value our students as individuals; each having their own interests, strengths and needs.

***“Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how people perceive the world and interact with others.”***

Autistic people see, hear and feel the world differently to other people. If you are autistic, you are autistic for life; autism is not an illness or disease and cannot be 'cured'. Often people feel being autistic is a fundamental aspect of their identity.

Autism is a spectrum condition. All autistic people share certain difficulties, but being autistic will affect them in different ways. Some autistic people also have learning disabilities, mental health issues or other conditions, meaning people need different levels of support. All people on the autism spectrum learn and develop. With the right sort of support, all can be helped to live a more fulfilling life of their own choosing.

(<http://www.autism.org.uk/card>)

Due to the nature of autism, our students are often lacking in social understanding and therefore need to be taught social 'norms' explicitly. In addition, a large proportion of students will also have individual sensory needs. Some students will display repetitive or stereo-typed behaviours (or behaviours that the neuro-typical population might find unusual), and many also find it difficult to understand and express their feelings. Our students experience difficulties understanding that other people may think and behave differently to themselves (Theory of Mind), and need support in understanding these differences. Students will display behaviours that arise due to autism as they learn to make sense of the world around them.

Students may have a wide range of comorbid conditions such as dyslexia, dyspraxia (or even difficulties with fine motor skills and proprioception) A.D.H.D, O.C.D or epilepsy, in addition to visual and physical difficulties. Some also have medical needs.

Every student is entitled to experience a variety of teaching and learning styles which enable them to reach their full potential. Our aim is to ensure that the students at CAA are provided with high quality first teaching and learning experiences that lead to a high level of student progress and attainment in all areas.

At CAA we follow the EYFS Objectives and the National Curriculum in Primary. At Secondary age we also follow the National Curriculum, but also offer access to the Key stage tests and a range of Entry level, Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications. We also believe our 'Social Curriculum' is invaluable to our students, supported and informed by the Autism Education Trust (AET) targets. We bespoke the curriculum to the

individual needs and aspirations of our students whilst addressing each pupil's barriers to learning and specific areas of need.

The Social Curriculum includes;

- Social Communication lessons
- Community and Life Skills (incorporating P.S.H.E , British Values, Careers, Citizenship and Feelings)

The curriculum as a whole is inclusive, broad and balanced. It provides a wide range of experiences and opportunities for students to develop socially, culturally, morally, spiritually as well as academically, inside and outside the school environment. Students learn a wide range of skills, knowledge and understanding. Importantly, whilst at CAA, students develop self- awareness, learning about themselves and their thoughts and behaviours. They learn about the needs of others and that others may think and behave differently to themselves. They develop social skills and social understanding and learn to be tolerant of others.

The curriculum is planned to meet the current needs and future aspirations of students. We believe it is important to equip our students with the necessary organisational and self-management skills that will allow them to be as independent as they can be. The curriculum allows students to gain the necessary skills and qualifications to secure places on a wide range of courses or to gain employment.

CAA seeks to create, enhance and embed inclusivity in all areas of its work, and in particular, promotes the full inclusion of students with ASC in society.

- We want to enable full social inclusion by providing a social and academic curriculum that is tailored to meet the needs and strengths of each pupil, enabling them to meet their full academic potential increasing their employability whilst also helping students to address their impairments and gain social understanding.
- We want to equip students with the skills, knowledge and understanding required to live economically successful lives allowing them to be part of and contribute to, the community and society through a variety of pathways; whether through volunteering, study or employment.
- We want to ensure that students develop self-acceptance and self-awareness; knowing their own strengths and areas of need, whilst encouraging them to show determination and resilience in addition to a tolerance for others.
- We want this to include developing skills, knowledge in the area of social understanding, social interaction, social communication and flexibility of thought as well as learning about themselves, their feelings and developing coping strategies. To gain an understanding of how they may be seen by neuro-typical people. To learn about their own sensory needs and perceptions.
- We want our learners to feel safe, confident, valued, empowered and listened to. We want them to respect themselves and others and the world we live in.
- We want our environment to reflect the needs of our students and celebrate their successes.
- We offer learning experiences that are motivating and challenging that help prepare the pupil for life.
- We want our learning opportunities to be creative, stimulating and inclusive to engage our students, allowing each individual to fulfil their potential whilst promoting lifelong learning.

- We want our students to be able to understand and manage their own emotions and feelings by developing individual strategies, communicating effectively and appropriately.
- We promote wellbeing helping students to understand how to keep themselves mentally and physically well.
- We want our students to know how to keep themselves safe and manage risk, knowing when and how to seek help where necessary.
- We want our students to leave us as confident and competent communicators, able to take their place in society as considerate and responsible young employable adults.

## **Transition into the school**

It is assumed that many students will join the school at the end of Year 6, however we will also have some in year transfers into other year groups. We intend to have a comprehensive transitional programme. During this transition information is gained from parents, feeder schools and other professionals. In particular information regarding:

- Academic levels
- Sensory issues or information
- Successful strategies in place
- Concerns regarding presentation or behaviour
- Medical/dietary needs

This information, along with experience of meeting and working with the child, informs our baseline assessment process, which takes place in the autumn term and the creation of a pen portrait ('About me'), risk assessment and IEP and PISP.

## **Bespoke Student Support**

As each student is seen as an individual, each has a variety of bespoke support measures to help aid their learning potential. Each child has an IEP (Individual Education Plan) and PISP (Positive Intervention Support Plan) and Risk Assessment which are drawn up during their first term at CAA. They have AET targets to track their individual social progress. These plans and targets are working documents which are regularly updated by staff in collaboration with parents. Some students also benefit from more specific support to help them achieve their potential such as Speech and Language.

## **Individual Education Plans**

All students have an IEP, the function of which is to support their social development alongside their literacy and numeracy development. Parents are able to fully contribute to these plans, supporting their child's development of knowledge, skills and understanding of the three areas of the triad as well as helping their child with their life skills, literacy and numeracy targets. Specific targets are set and evidence gained relating to achievement against those targets. This information is held in our Management Information System (MIS) so that specific progress can be monitored.

## Positive Intervention Support Plans

All students have a PISP. This indicates the 'function' of a child's behaviour. These are;

- Attention seeking behaviours
- Behaviour that is displayed as a child has a need to be alone
- Behaviour that demonstrates that a child needs to escape
- Behaviours that occur so the person can obtain a tangible item or gain access to a desired activity

The PISPs show pro-active, active and reactive strategies that are to be used by staff. They enable us to understand individual triggers and effective de-escalation techniques for each student.

## Positive Handling Plan

The safety of staff and students is the prime, underpinning aim of the use of positive handling plans. Planned intervention, in which staff employ where necessary, pre-arranged strategies and methods based upon a risk assessment and recorded in care plans are evident for some students. It is essential that the physical management of pupils is seen as a rare occurrence and as a last resort. It is not used to discipline or punish children and it must be used in ways that maintain the safety and dignity of all concerned.

The purpose of positive handling is:

- To keep the pupil safe until the emotional response passes, self-control is regained and the situation is diffused;
- To limit the harm that the pupil can do to self and others;
- To demonstrate to the pupil that he/she is within safe physical boundaries and that adults can support him/her with their anger.

## Sensory Diets

We aim to have all students with a carefully designed, personalised plan of sensory needs that provides the sensory input a student needs to stay focused and organised throughout the day. Students need to engage in stabilising and focused activities. We recognise that each child has a unique set of sensory needs. Generally, a child whose nervous system makes them feel and appear "high trigger/too wired" needs more calming input, while the child who may appear "sluggish/too tired" needs more arousing input. The effects of a sensory diet are help to restructure the student's nervous system over time so they are better able to:

- Tolerate sensations and situations they find challenging
- Regulate their alertness and increase attention span
- Limit sensory seeking and sensory avoiding behaviours
- Handle transitions with less stress

## Speech and Language Therapy

This contributes to the development of IEP targets and provides advice and support to staff. (See also Speech and Language Therapy Policy.) Access to our Speech and Language Therapist (SLTs) is currently through Mabel Therapy, which identifies individual need and offers strategies and advice provide life-improving treatment, support and care for our students who have difficulties with communication.

## One to One Support

Some students receive 1-1 support due to their specific needs. These are individualised support, for example emotional wellbeing, reading, dyslexia, anger management or whatever else may be required to help the individual child.

## School Counselling

The school has access to counselling and emotional wellbeing through Mable Therapy. Referrals are made by staff or requested by parents. The counsellor will then meet with individual students supporting students around issues such as self-esteem and anger management improving their readiness to learn.

## Learning Environment

The Academy strives to maintain a safe, warm, friendly yet visually clear learning environment. Students are to be involved in the development of the indoor and outdoor facilities including the sensory garden, allotment and adventure areas. Displays aid learning and celebrate our student's successes through both visual and written information. We are aware that our students can be hypo or hyper sensitive and so, where necessary, displays are kept within borders so that our learners are not distracted by stimuli.

We follow the T.E.A.C.C.H approach to the environment as this provides student support through a clear, unambiguous, visual information system. Our classrooms and other areas are clutter free. We provide structure and visual cues within specific areas of the room. We provide labels to show where equipment is kept which aids independence and promotes organisational skills.

In order to support the whole-school visual approach, staff are agreeing a consistent set of visual symbols to depict activities, events, academic subjects etc, which will be regularly updated and monitored.

## Curriculum

The school is committed to providing a broad curriculum that is relevant and meaningful to the students that attend the school. This includes the National Curriculum but it is recognised that this addresses only a proportion of the needs of our students and that there is a need for a wider vision of what constitutes a full curriculum. Subject areas focus, therefore, on developing key skills which ultimately improve learning and enable students to access their community independently.

Students can access a range of qualifications from ELC through to GCSE in both academic and vocational subjects.

Staff understand how autism affects learning in their specific subject areas and know how to address barriers to learning. Students study both an "academic" and "social" curriculum in which they are taught important social skills and social understanding. These are fundamental skills and understanding that our students require to succeed in life.

## Approaches

CAA has an eclectic approach to teaching, using a range of programmes and interventions which are proven and have evidence of effectiveness behind them. This way, we are able to combine the best of all methodologies to form a strong, cohesive learning system which focusses on positive achievement and progressions in order to ensure that each pupil reaches their maximum potential and is prepared for adult life.

Small classes and a high staff to pupil ratio are essential in order to facilitate learning and ensure that students receive considerable individualised attention and support.

Provision is highly structured, reflecting in particular elements of the following approaches:

## SPELL

This ensures that learning takes place that is

- **Structured** – with a high level of visual cues and enhanced communication systems
- **Positive** – using positive approaches, reinforcement and expectations
- **Empathetic** – staff demonstrating empathy with regards to the individual and viewpoint of the students
- **Low arousal**- teaching areas promoting a calm, non-confrontational atmosphere
- **Links** – with parents, other professionals, the community and other schools

## Effective learning

*Effective learning takes place when:*

- The learning environment is stable and secure.
- Students understand the purpose of the learning
- Students demonstrate a clear understanding of what is expected of them and the objectives of the lesson.
- Success criteria are explicit and models are provided.
- The learning builds on prior knowledge and understanding.
- Students are challenged and extended.
- The learning is active and students demonstrate the ability and willingness to work collaboratively and co-operatively.
- Independent learning and thinking is encouraged and facilitated.
- Students are evaluating and reflecting on their own work and can self-assess, know what they have to do to improve and are able to set appropriate targets.
- Student questioning and discussion are encouraged.
- There are opportunities for creativity and utilising different learning styles.
- Students have opportunities to transfer skills, knowledge and understanding to other concepts.
- Students have the opportunity to feedback on their learning.

***We want students to enjoy what they are doing and have fun when doing it, this is when students learn best, because their emotional state is fundamental to learning.***

## Behaviour

We aim to ensure that every child and situation is dealt with in a fair, compassionate, safe and dignified way. Our aim is to teach children to manage themselves through positive behaviour support and a restorative process. The school has comprehensive policies for Behaviour and Care and Control which provide details on our approaches in these situations.

Some children may exhibit unusual or challenging behaviour, particularly when they are anxious or experiencing sensory difficulties. Many of these behaviours rise from fear, frustration or insufficient

understanding of their environment or teachers' expectations. Feelings of 'social failure' can all induce anxiety and students may lack the communication skills to express their feelings in a more positive manner.

Some behaviour may occur due to high aspiration goals that staff set for students. Often our students will have stereotypical views about what they should learn in a particular subject area and having their own areas of special interest they can sometimes be resistant to new learning experiences. Addressing these issues helps children to broaden their knowledge, skills and interests.

Some behaviours may relate to the child's sensory perceptions. A child may also feel overwhelmed in a particular situation and may experience sensory overload. Students may also become anxious when they find themselves in places or in situations that they have not experienced previously. It is therefore important to prepare students for new experiences in advance and foresee problems that may occur. Students each have their own risk assessments. Risk assessments for specific experiences or venues are also compiled. All students have a sensory diet following a sensory assessment which feeds into the IEP.

Positive reinforcements, and strategies such as diversion, distraction or access to 'down time' are integrated into the pupil's day. In addition to these, proactive interventions such as the social communication focus, anger management sessions and coaching support pupil behaviour. The school Behaviour Policy details the training undertaken by all staff in the Team Teach method for Behaviour Management, an approach certificated by BILD (British Institute for Learning Difficulties).

Incidents are recorded by staff and monitored by SLT. Where students are experiencing particular difficulties we can intervene to put in place support and appropriate strategies to minimise lapses in behaviour. Class rules relating to pupil conduct are displayed in visual and written form in each classroom and around school to reinforce expectations. We involve the child in discussions and help them to become more self-aware. Coping strategies may be discussed. Parents are kept informed of minor or more serious incidents via the or by telephone or email (where appropriate).

## Social Understanding/Learning

Strategies such as **social stories** and **comic strip conversations** devised by Carol Gray are widely used to support understanding of social situations, and develop understanding of others. Social stories provide a structured narrative which explains a particular situation, skill or concept. The aim of a social story is to share accurate social information in a patient and reassuring manner that is easily understood. It is hoped that increased understanding of events and expectations may lead to more appropriate behavioural or social responses.

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.

Students learn about their own feelings and emotions and how best to deal with them in 'Feelings lessons' which are incorporated into the social curriculum. They learn how a person looks, the effect on their bodies and about how to react appropriately in various situations. They learn to read body language, facial expression and gesture.

Where appropriate, we will use external agencies, ie. People First or NHS, to help support social understanding and learning.

## **Social Communication Rules**

- Thinking
- Sitting
- Waiting
- Looking
- Listening
- Speaking clearly
- Taking turns to speak
- Right volume
- Right distance
- Right speech – right person
- Remember faces and bodies

These will be visually displayed in classrooms and highlighted by staff as required. Staff also may carry smaller visual reminders of these rules to use as appropriate.

## **Preparation for the future**

At CAA, we endeavour to prepare our students for adult life, and living in 21<sup>st</sup> century society. We acknowledge that within this aim there are a number of elements, all of which need to be in place if a pupil is to take their place as a productive, happy, fulfilled member of society.

On a practical level, we will provide a number of varied opportunities for students to experience the world of Further Education and employment through work experience, volunteering, college links and extended transition programmes. We will work closely with partners such as local colleges, Connexions, Inspira, health professionals and employers to ensure our students feel safe and secure and that their needs are understood. It is important to remember that whilst many of our students have extensive academic potential, they also need to learn how to use and apply their knowledge in the wider world. We use our knowledge of each pupil to help them to maximise their potential.

## **Employability curriculum**

We have high aspirations for our young people as we are aware that only 15% of autistic people gain full time employment. We aim to support students in planning their future pathways. We help students to recognise their strengths and understand how their impairments may affect them. We help them to understand their own sensory needs, learn how to have effective relationships with others and teach social understanding.

Students will learn about the careers that relate to various subject areas. They will learn to be resilient and determined. Many autistic people choose to become self-employed and this should be respected. Students need to develop skills to enable them to manage money and become organised.

## **Managing Change**

Managing change can be difficult for the majority of our students. This is related to their difficulties with imagination or flexibility of thought. Routines are important and help the individual to feel safe and secure. However, we live in a changing world, where the unexpected can happen, and where outcomes to events are not always reliable or predictable. To this end we do run special days to enable students to experience and be prepared for non-routine occurrences. We believe learning in this area also provides students with another life skill which they can use in adult life.

In order to support our students, and to develop their ability in this area, we ensure that any changes are carefully planned and implemented, that students and families are provided with full information in a format that is easily understood. We teach our students how to cope when changes occur and strategies for managing their anxiety, if appropriate.

## **References**

### ***School policies***

Behaviour Policy

Care and Control Policy

Speech and Language Therapist Policy

Assessment Policy

### ***Other***

National Autistic Society ([www.autism.org](http://www.autism.org))

Wing and Gould (1979)

Schopler T.E.A.C.C.H