

Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) Identification Process and School Offer

At St Mary of the Angels, we recognise that Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) is a lifelong condition which affects how a person communicates and interacts with the world. ASC affects each person differently, each child will present their own set of personality traits. Like all children, children with ASC have their own strengths and difficulties. We therefore look at each case on an individual basis, creating provision that best supports them and their needs.

Autism is considered a neuro-diverse condition as the brain behaves and reacts differently to what would be considered neuro-typical.

Social Communication & Social Interaction Challenges

Social communication refers to the ability to interpret language, this includes tone of voice, body language and gestures. This also refers to their ability to communicate with others, they may have no or limited speech while others may have very good language skills.

Social interactions refers to a person's ability to "read" someone else. It is about recognising and understanding someone else's feelings and intentions, as well as understanding and expressing their own emotions.

Repetitive and Restrictive Behaviour

A child with ASC can feel comfort in having predictable routines in their life. They can feel stressed over sudden changes and like to stay within their own realms of what they find familiar. They create ways to feel in control of their environment by displaying repetitive behaviours such as; ordering objects, repeating words or phrases, playing with toys in the same way every time, obsessive interests, focusing on parts of objects (e.g wheels). This can also include stimming behaviours such as flapping hands, rocking body, or spinning in circles.

Sensory Sensitivity

ASC affects how the brain interprets the world. This can affect how sensitive a child's senses can be. ASC might create overly sensitive senses where the child is bothered by some or multiple stimuli, e.g. smells, textures, sounds. A child may be hyper aware of stimuli that a neuro-typical person does not notice such as the buzzing of a light, or where their sleeve ends on their arm. Likewise, ASC might have the opposite effect and create a numbness to different stimuli creating a lack of awareness in the child.

Meltdowns and Shutdowns

When a child with ASC reaches a breaking point, where they have become overly stressed, tired or stimulated, they can react in one of two ways; a meltdown or a shutdown. A meltdown is synonymous with a "fight" response (fight, flight, or freeze)

and can be mistaken for a tantrum. Shutdowns are similar to a “freeze” response, where the individual has been so overwhelmed in a high demand situation that they only can run basic functions. They are at a reduced ability to process what is going on around them and may struggle to communicate as they normally do.

Autism in Girls

Autism is present in both girls and boys. However, girls have a tendency to develop better coping strategies or masking techniques at an early age, their drive to conform leads to their difficulties often getting missed or overlooked. As a school we are working to recognise the presentations of autism in girls, and whilst they may not have a diagnosis we will meet the needs of each individual to remove any barriers they have to accessing provision.

Identification and Support at St Mary of the Angels

At St Mary of the Angels Catholic Primary School we ensure that we offer an ASC friendly school environment and approach to learning. We believe in early intervention and identification of additional needs. We work with parents of children who display signs of ASC to put provision in place to remove barriers to emotional wellbeing, learning and social interaction. Initial identification of signs of ASC may come from school or the family home. A discussion will take place between the class teacher and the parents, the SENDCo will be brought in on this to discuss the areas of need and how we can best progress.

In some cases where intervention has not successfully removed barriers and the child continues to struggle we progress on the ASC pathway with CWAC multiagency services.

This is a referral made to the ASC pathway in CWAC which may progress to involve further assessment by a specialist nurse or paediatrician. This referral requires the school and parents to work together over two terms to complete a questionnaire and gather evidence of what has worked for the child and what remains a concern. This evidence is then submitted to the pathway and will be triaged to decide if the child requires a further assessment.

Please see below the approaches and strategies we offer to children with ASC at St Mary of the Angels

	Communication & Interaction	Cognition & Learning	Physical / Sensory	Emotional Support
Use of visual symbols in the class (to do lists, success criteria, timetable, choice boards)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Makaton Signs	✓	✓		

Social Stories	✓	✓		✓
Lego Therapy	✓		✓	✓
Colourful Semantics	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wellcomm Programme	✓	✓		
Lunchtime Provision	✓		✓	✓
Use of concise language	✓	✓		
First/Then, Now/Next approach	✓	✓		✓
Checklists / Success Criteria	✓	✓		✓
Alternative methods of recording (iPads, Chromebooks, etc)		✓	✓	
Seating Plans		✓	✓	✓
Work Buddies (Peer Support)	✓	✓		✓
Sensory Breaks (scheduled and spontaneous)		✓	✓	✓
Regular Check-Ins	✓	✓		✓
Tasks themed to match interests where possible		✓		
CBT Programme Activities			✓	✓
Sensory Circuits			✓	✓
Zones of Regulation	✓			✓
Pastoral Support / Meet & Greets	✓			✓
Sensory Room Access			✓	✓
Class Sensory Baskets / Aids			✓	✓
Workstation	✓	✓	✓	✓
Play Therapy	✓			✓
Quiet Spaces			✓	✓
Worry Monsters	✓			✓
Mindfulness Activities (yoga, meditation etc)			✓	✓
Attention Autism: Bucket Therapy	✓	✓	✓	✓

Useful websites:

National Autistic Society: <https://www.autism.org.uk/>

NHS – Autism: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/autism/>

Carol Gray Social Stories: <https://carolgraysocialstories.com/>

The Hanen Centre: <https://www.hanen.org/Home.aspx>

Conscience Discipline (American): <https://consciousdiscipline.com/>

Autism Education Trust: <https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/>