



Birmingham
Independent College



BIRMINGHAM INDEPENDENT COLLEGE

Autism (ASD) Policy

Next Review: October 2024

Introduction

Students at Birmingham Independent College (BIC) have a statement that defines them as having learning difficulties or complex needs. A large section of our pupils also have a diagnosis of an autistic spectrum disorder, the primary characteristics of which are as follows; difficulties in non-verbal and verbal communication, social understanding and social behaviour, and thinking and behaving flexibly (rigidity of thought). Pupils with ASD are often predisposed to sensory irregularities and elevated levels of stress and anxiety. Many of our pupils have difficulty in recognizing, understanding and regulating their own emotions.

Rationale

To ensure that our students on the autistic spectrum are able to fully access the curriculum on offer, their needs should be considered in all aspects of their daily life.

Aims

To ensure that the following principles inform our practice and enable us to provide the best possible provision for pupils on the autistic spectrum;

- A good knowledge of autistic spectrum disorders.
- A good knowledge of interventions and the relevance of these for individuals.
- A good knowledge of general and specific behaviours and strategies to cope with these.
- Staff will keep up to date with current research relating to autistic spectrum disorders and related conditions.
- Provision for these pupils will be continuously monitored as part of the school self-evaluation process.

Sensory Issues / Environment

Many of our pupils have sensory difficulties which have an impact on their ability to focus on teaching activities, their learning and often their behaviour. These difficulties can cause extreme distress to our pupils. Most pupils with a statement of autistic spectrum disorder will have been assessed by an Occupational Therapist and, if appropriate, a sensory diet will be developed taken from their Educational Health Care Plan (EHCP). Staff will be advised by our SENCO on the best way to deliver the diet for individual pupils via the new starter overview plan. These sensory diets will be reviewed regularly. Many of our pupils also have difficulty with flexibility of thought and require highly organized visual supports to help them understand routines, expectations and emotions. At BIC we try to reduce environmental anxiety by providing the following:

- A calm, distraction free environment, with a low level of visual and auditory stimulus.
- A high degree of visual and physical structure to the day.
- A curriculum that provides pupils with the opportunity to learn how to self-regulate their emotions and behaviour.
- A Structured, Positive, Empathic and Low-arousal environment with good links between home, school and outside agencies

- A mix of established approaches and interventions drawing on best practice. The interventions include Social Communication, Emotional Regulation, Transactional Supports, PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) and Intensive Interaction.

Curriculum

Students have access to a curriculum centred on Social Communication, Emotional Regulation, Transactional Supports, the National Curriculum and Personal Improvement Plans. This curriculum places an emphasis on independence, social interaction, social understanding, social communication and emotional regulation. We also provide a curriculum for pupils which allows for many 'real life' opportunities e.g. visits to shops, restaurants, the dentist etc. This curriculum also addresses sensory issues, and it aims to provide students with the tools to deal with these. Students have access to a curriculum based around National Curriculum, Personal Pathways, and Asdan etc.

At BIC we believe that a pupil's behaviour is a way of communicating and we endeavour to understand the meaning behind every behaviour. All students have individual 'Pathways to Success' that are regularly reviewed by class teams, and which establish the best way for staff to understand and support individual students in all areas of their college life, including behaviour. We recognize the need for students to generalise the skills they learn across college, and SLT liaises regularly with parents, respite provision and outside agencies to share strategies that work for individuals.

All staff in our college have training in autism awareness and sensory issues and Team Teach positive behaviour.

Terminology

At BIC, we have traditionally referred to students on the autism spectrum as having ASD. Over a number of years, there has been an ongoing debate (internationally) around terminology, particularly the use of ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) and ASC (Autism Spectrum Condition). Following on from recent and upcoming changes to the main diagnostic manuals, 'Autism Spectrum Disorder' (ASD) is now likely to become the most commonly given diagnostic term.

The guidance below is based on the NAS language research on the preferences of autistic people, their families and professionals, as well as the feedback and insight the National Autistic Society (NAS) get from their supporters and wider work.

The most important thing to remember is that many autistic people see their autism as a fundamental part of who they are, so it is important to use positive language. If you are referring to a particular person or group, ask them how they would prefer to be described. This preference should take precedence over the NAS recommendations outlined below.

Accepted Terminology:

- autistic adult/people/child
- person/child on the autism spectrum (note: this is informed by research, which indicates that there is a growing preference for positive identity first language, particularly among autistic adults)
- is autistic
- is on the autism spectrum

- has an autism diagnosis
- disabled person/person with a disability
- disability or condition
- Asperger syndrome is a form of autism (note: Asperger is pronounced with a hard "g")
- talk about the autism spectrum and the varying challenges and strengths people have (for instance, some autistic people have an accompanying learning disability and need support to do everyday things like clean, cook or exercise. Other autistic people are in full time work, with just a little extra support)
- not autistic
- neurotypical (note: neurotypical is mainly used by autistic people so may not be applicable in, for example, the popular press)
- autistic people, their families and friends
- people on the autism spectrum, their families and friends
- support or adjustments
- traits or characteristics
- autism department

Staff should use their best judgement when using terminology and use the above advice for reference. Staff should not worry about getting minor terminology wrong (as this is difficult for us all), but it is good to be aware of the advice set out by the NAS: <https://www.autism.org.uk>