BIRMINGHAM INDEPENDENT COLLEGE

Autism (ASD) Policy

Next Review: October 2026

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 students also have a diagnosis of an autistic spectrum condition (ASC), 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). Students with ASC are often predisposed to sensory irregularities and elevated levels of stress and anxiety. Many of our pupils have difficulty in recognising, 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 students on the autistic spectrum we have;

- A good knowledge of autistic spectrum condition
- 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 condition and related conditions.
- Provision for these students will be continuously monitored as part of the school self- evaluation process.

Sensory Issues/Environment

Many of our students have sensory difficulties which have an impact on their ability to focus during teaching activities in their classrooms. This inadvertently affects their learning and often their behaviour causing extreme distress to our students. Most students with autistic spectrum condition have been assessed by an Educational Psychologist/Occupational Therapist and these assessments together with their Educational Health Care Plan (ECHP) helps our SENCO to generate an overview sheet for each student. This is shared with all staff to help best support the student. Many of our students also have difficulty with flexibility of thought and require highly organised 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 students 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 external 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), Aided Learning Display (ALD) Boards, and Intensive Interaction.

Curriculum

Birmingham Independent College (BIC) is committed to delivering an inclusive, aspirational, and high-quality education that enables every learner to achieve their full potential. Our curriculum is designed to meet the diverse needs of learners with autism, social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, and a wide range of learning disabilities.

The curriculum provides academic rigour, vocational opportunity, and experiential learning that supports **independence, functionality, and widening community awareness** – the three pillars that underpin our provision and ethos.

We believe education should inspire curiosity, build confidence, and prepare young people for a meaningful adult life.

This policy outlines how BIC's curriculum is planned, implemented, and evaluated in line with the Ofsted Education Inspection Framework (EIF), Independent School Standards (Part 1), SEND Code of Practice (2015), and Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE 2025).

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).

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.

Do say	Avoid saying
• autistic person • autistic adult/child/people ***Explainer:*** *this is 'identity first' language, which is preferred by most autistic people because they see being autistic as integral to who they are, not as something they 'have'.*	• person with autism • adult/child/people with autism ***Explainer:*** *this is 'person first' language, which is not preferred by most autistic people, though it is preferred by some disabled people who see their disability as something they 'have', not something they 'are'.*
• is autistic • has an autism diagnosis	• has autism • suffers from/is a victim of autism • living with autism • an autistic/autist/autie/aspie ***Note:*** *some autistic people may refer to themselves using these terms, but it isn't appropriate to use them unless this has been specifically requested.*
• a*utism is understood as a spectrum because each autistic person has a unique combination of characteristics*	• 'everyone is on the spectrum somewhere' / 'everyone is a little autistic' ***Explainer:*** *these statements are incorrect as the autism spectrum refers to autistic people specifically. The statements are considered offensive because they are dismissive of autistic people's specific experience.*
•	•

Do say	Avoid saying
• the terminology used in the current medical manuals DSM-5 and ICD-11 is 'autism spectrum disorder' ***Note:*** *avoid using 'disorder' unless specifically referring to terminology in the medical manuals*	• autism is a disorder • has autism spectrum disorder ***Explainer:*** *although 'disorder' is used in the medical terminology, most autistic people do not view autism as a disorder and consider the medical terminology to be pathologising. So, while they have a diagnosis of 'autism spectrum disorder', they do not consider themselves to have 'autism spectrum disorder' because they do not recognise autism as a disorder and being autistic is something they are not something they have.*
• disability ***Note:*** *some autistic people consider that they are disabled by society (this is known as the 'social model') or that being autistic is a disability, and some do not. Autistic people have legal protections because autism is a disability.* • difference	• disease/illness/mental illness ***Note:*** *autism is none of these things.* • handicap ***Note:*** *this is outdated language.* • learning disability ***Note:*** *autism is not a learning disability, but some autistic people also have a learning disability.* • disfunction • syndrome • deficit/impairment
• autism is a lifelong neurodivergence and disability	• any statement that implies only children are autistic ***Note:*** *autistic children grow up into autistic adults; you cannot 'grow out' of being autistic.*
• non-autistic people • people who are not autistic • neurotypical people	• 'normal' people ***Explainer:*** *the concept of there being 'normal' – and therefore by implication 'abnormal' – people is offensive because it suggests a hierarchy where there is only one 'right' way of being.*

Do say	Avoid saying
· autism is a form of neurodivergence · autistic people are neurodivergent · autistic self-advocates are central to the neurodiversity movement · autism is a neurological difference	· autism is a neurological disorder ***Reminder:*** *most autistic people (and many others) do not consider autism to be a disorder.*
· like anyone, autistic people have a range of strengths and challenges (for example, some autistic people also have a learning disability and may need support with daily tasks like washing, cooking or exercising. Other autistic people are in full-time work and may benefit from reasonable adjustments)	· autistic people need extra help with 'X, Y and Z' ***Note:*** *remember that all autistic people are different; it is inaccurate to generalise about the support individuals may need.*
· autistic person with high/low support needs · an autistic person with/without a learning disability	· high/low functioning autistic person · mild/severe autism ***Explainer:*** *functioning and severity labels are inaccurate and considered offensive; they fail to capture how a person's needs may vary (they may excel at certain things while finding others very challenging) and fluctuate (according to the situation), and because they locate all challenges innately within the person's ability rather than due to a societal or situational failure to meet the person's access needs.*
· support strategies/adjustments · access requirements/needs ***For example:*** *information in writing; help with cooking; to be able to wear ear defenders.*	· treatments/cures ***Reminder:*** *autism is not an illness or a disease and it cannot be 'treated' or 'cured'.* · special treatment · special needs ***Note:*** *this is outdated language.*

Do say	Avoid saying
· 'Asperger's syndrome' was a diagnosis previously given to some autistic people · 'Asperger's syndrome' is no longer given as a diagnosis ***Note:*** *people who might previously have received this diagnosis now receive an autism diagnosis. Some people who were originally given this diagnosis still use the phrase and some don't.*	· Asperger's syndrome is a form of autism · Asperger's syndrome is a mild form of autism
· autistic people, their families and friends · the autistic community (this includes autistic people only) · the autism community (this includes autistic people, their family and friends, and professionals)	· people living with autism · people whose lives are touched by autism ***Explainer:*** *it is commonly considered offensive to try to separate autism from the autistic person. Autistic people are intrinsically autistic, it is not an 'add-on' that they carry 'with' them or that 'touches' their lives, it is essential to who they are.*
· common autistic traits / characteristics · a person's autism profile	· symptoms of autism ***Explainer:*** *the word 'symptoms' is used to describe illnesses and is therefore not appropriate when discussing autism because it is not an illness.*
· a non-speaking autistic person · an autistic person who speaks few or no words · an autistic person who has intermittent or unreliable speech ***Note:*** *some autistic people who often use speech can lose this ability when they are overwhelmed, for example by stress or the sensory environment.*	· a non-verbal autistic person ***Explainer:*** *some autistic people who speak few or no words have explained that it is incorrect to say they are 'non-verbal' because they often can and do verbalise and use words. It is more accurate to refer to whether or how reliably they use speech. It is important to remember that many people communicate effectively in other ways, such as in writing, using AAC or through gesture.*

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