



Brookfields School

Flexibility of Thought Policy

Leadership Team

November 2017

School Statement

Autism is diagnosed according to behavioural criteria although it is a syndrome with biological and genetic links [Happe1994]. It is characterised by significant impairments in three areas of development;

- impairment of social interaction;
- impairment of social communication
- impairment in imagination and flexibility of thought.

Learning and development in pupils with ASD does not follow the usual patterns and milestones. To address this and to maximise the learning potential of everyone it is important to understand the deficits and strengths and promote whenever possible learning opportunities to develop the areas outlined above.

What is Flexibility of Thought?

People with ASD may have an impaired ability to use imagination to problem solve and predict outcomes on a day to day basis. Difficulties link to the ability to reflect on ones' own thinking about experiences not already encountered. This includes the ability to engage in pretend play, role play and take part in curriculum activities that involve abstract thinking and the use of imagination.

The effect this has on a child/ person with ASD is that they have difficulty predicting what could happen next or in determining what is expected. This may lead to a learner becoming reliant on establishing routines and rituals to secure a familiar outcome in environments that are constantly changing.

Pupils with autism at Brookfields may display this in the following ways:

The child/young person;

- Cannot easily make sense of sequences and events
- May become distressed if a familiar routine changes
- May engage in stereotypical body movements
- May impose routines on others
- May resist new experiences e.g. trying different foods, handling different materials
- Finds it hard to work out what other people are going to do and cannot make sense of why they do things– unable to take someone else's perspective
- Will only develop imaginative play slowly, if at all
- May pay particular attention to unusual details
- Has poor self-organisational skills and difficulties with structuring personal time productively
- Relies on rituals and set procedures, has a desire to preserve sameness and a strong resistance to change
- Has difficulty generalising skills into different settings
- Has a limited repertoire of interests and activities that may be pursued to obsessive levels

- Has very poor levels of incidental learning and limited imitation skills
- Lacks imagination and original thought which is particularly noticeable in play activities. Pupils may enact scenes from cartoons, films, books etc.

At Brookfields School we aim to compensate for this impairment by teaching skills which will enable pupils to problem solve, plan and cope with change. It is important to ensure pupils have the opportunities to generalise these skills across a variety of settings. Focussed activities will be incorporated into the curriculum through play and practical teaching and learning activities. Also, it will be addressed through educational trips, after school clubs, lunchtime and break time activities and other opportunities within curriculum areas.

Provision for the development of Flexibility of Thought

- Newly appointed staff have a thorough induction which includes knowledge of the Triad of Impairments and how the impairment of the third part of the triad impacts on a pupil's flexibility and imagination. Information is given to assist understanding of the impact of the rigid thinking patterns of pupils with ASD.
- Use of *TEACCH* strategies such as structure of the environment and visual schedules, written lists and organisers facilitate pupil's understanding of events, allow for introduction of change and encourage the development of flexibility. A 'surprise' symbol is used on timetables to prepare pupils for change and schedules are regularly 'sabotaged' to provide pupils with the opportunities to experience change and rehearse strategies for coping with this.
- Where required, school-based behaviour management sheets highlight areas of inflexibility for individual pupils and outline ways of managing it both by the pupil and by staff teams.
- Staff are trained in the use of *Social Stories* and they are used in all classes to address the needs of pupils who have difficulties in particular areas. For example, 'theory of mind' describes the difficulty individuals with autism have in assuming the perspective of another person. This can be addressed by strategies such as by the Social Story or comic strip technique to help individuals 'read' and understand situations and to also helps them answer the 'who,' 'what', 'when', 'where' and 'why' of social settings. Other language-based programmes such as Narrative Therapy support these structures.
- All pupils have individual programmes and IEP's that contribute to the promotion of the development of Flexibility of Thought through a range of activities and strategies.
- The use of planned changes and strategies such as 'sabotage' are used to enable children to cope in controlled situations, which are then generalised into other settings.

- There are planned opportunities for pupils to develop skills in making choices, sequencing, managing change, decision making and problem solving throughout the curriculum and school day.
- The special interests of pupils are built into individual programmes, job routines, snack time or as rewards as part of daily timetables.
- Targets for structured play address this impairment through *social* and *joint attention routine* and *shared referencing* activities. These *joint attention* strategies are generalised within a variety of curriculum areas [i.e. English/Maths] and are incorporated into the Individual Education Plan for identified pupils.
- Identified pupils have input from a fully qualified Music Therapist and this encourages the development of *shared attention*. It also helps the pupil to see what they are doing in a new way [mirroring] by reflecting back what they are doing through music.
- Where appropriate, pupils take part in Inclusion Programmes with our local mainstream school which increases the range of experiences for those pupils and helps address the rigidity present in autism. For our youngest pupils we implement a term of integration with children from our local Children's Centre Nursery attending weekly for a play session in our setting.
- Each class has a weekly educational visit linked to curricular topics. Visual timetables help pupils manage any problems linked to change and detailed risk assessments indicate any difficulties enabling pupils to take part safely in these opportunities.
- The school has several successful after school clubs (Drama, Rebound Therapy, Multiskills & Cookery) which give pupil extracurricular opportunities to develop flexibility of thought through sport, role play, creative dance, imaginative activities and to explore emotions.
- Pupils have a range of experiences throughout the school week of working in different areas across the school and within mixed groups for a small number of subjects. This increased variance contributes to their ability to develop skills in managing change across a range of settings. Areas available for use include the light room, sensory soft play, cookery room, music room and multisensory hall as well as a wide range of outdoor areas.
- Communication Passports are written for pupils at Brookfields to aid transition between classes and settings. Members of the teaching team, parents, carers and multi-disciplinary staff contribute to the Communication Passport. The headings within the passport can be changed to individualise the passport to more effectively meet the needs of individual pupils. The school strongly supports all pupils having their own personal communication passport that outlines the optimum way they communicate, their likes and dislikes, and how to maintain an exchange etc.

- For newly admitted pupil's information is collated from previous assessments
- Ongoing assessment takes place at school through use of EYFS Profile, B-Squared, Boxall Profile, SCERTS, CHESS etc.

Policy Statement and Recording of Progress

- This policy ensures that pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder have maximum access to the curriculum, that they raise their achievement and increase their interaction with others. It focuses on removing barriers and promoting pupils' opportunities for learning in inclusive environments within and outside school.
- Pupils at Brookfields are to be involved in a wide range of opportunities to develop their flexibility of thought and imagination.
- At Brookfields School we acknowledge the importance of addressing this impairment within the school's curriculum and in lessons, however it is not only to be confined to timetabled sessions but addressed across the whole school day and across a wide range of contexts.
- Pupil's targets in this area are addressed in the IEP and across the school day and are summarised within the School Annual Progress Report and reviewed through the annual EHCP review alongside termly pupil progress meetings etc.

Training

Good practice is shared and encouraged throughout school and new staff receive information regarding Flexibility of Thought issues as part of their induction. Staff also attend external training which is then disseminated across the body of staff. There are regular staff meetings / INSET at Brookfields for all staff to maintain skills and knowledge.

Resources

Resources for Flexibility of Thought development will be needs-led and identified by the teaching area team in conjunction with parents and other professionals.

Equal Opportunities

In all areas of learning staff aim to promote equal opportunities in accordance with school policy.

Dissemination of Policy

The policy will be disseminated widely. The school and Governors should ensure that they have knowledge of the policy and its implications for the school. It is the responsibility of the Headteacher to inform the Governors of any amendments.

Review Date

This policy will be reviewed in November 2020.