SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS POLICY 2025-2027

Special Educational Needs Policy

Introduction

This policy has been written in line with the expectations and guidelines of the SEN Code of Practice (2014). LVS Oxford provides a broad and balanced curriculum for all students.

The Curriculum Statement gives information regarding the specific nature of the curriculum delivered at LVS Oxford. When planning, teachers set suitable learning challenges and respond to the diverse learning needs of the students. Staff take account of the special educational needs presented by the students they teach and make provision to support individuals or groups of students through their planning. This will ensure that all children are able to access and participate fully in the curriculum. Some students may require additional or different help from that of their peers.

Aims

The aims of this policy are:

- To create an environment which meets the educational needs of all students
- To ensure that the special educational needs of students are identified, assessed and provided for
- To make clear the expectations of all stakeholders in the process;
- To identify the roles and responsibilities of staff in providing for students' special educational needs;
- To enable all students to have full access to all elements of the school curriculum
- To ensure that parents can play their part in supporting their child's education

Educational Inclusion

LVS Oxford is an environment which offers choice and excellence to all our students whatever their ability or needs. We have high expectations of every student and help them to achieve their full potential through the removal of barriers to learning and participation. We want all our students to feel a valued member of our community.

Through appropriate curricular provision, we respect the fact that students:

- Have different educational and behavioural needs and aspirations;
- Require structured teaching approaches, visual supports, concrete learning opportunities and restricted language to support their learning;
- Acquire, assimilate and communicate information at different rates; • Need a range of different learning experiences.

Staff respond to the needs of our students by:

- Presenting work visually, using agreed formats of interactive whiteboards, individual whiteboards, task instructions and check lists
- Using structured support systems to ensure students understand: What work they have to do
  Where they have to work
  How much work they have to complete
  What they have to do next
  What their reward will be
- Helping students to identify strategies to manage their behaviour and to take part in learning effectively and safely

- Helping students to manage their emotions and support them in identifying calming strategies such as deep breathing and time out

Special Educational Needs

All students are assessed when they start at LVS Oxford so that the staff can build on prior learning and use this information to provide a starting point for the development of an appropriate curriculum for each young person.

Each student has a Student Profile that is drawn up by the student's class teacher or LSA, with input from the student and his/her parents. Short-term targets are recorded on the Student Progress document together with suitable strategies to enable the student to meet these targets and the expected outcome. Student Progress documents are reviewed every three months and targets amended as appropriate to the progress of each student.

Students at LVS Oxford are supported by an Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP). The Principal is responsible for completing applications for any additional funding identified.

Assessment

The class teacher will assess and monitor the progress of the student in line with the school's working practices and if necessary, consult with other professionals to devise any additional programmes of support. All students are monitored regularly by the class teacher who liaises with the therapy team to ensure that changes in rates of progress are noted as quickly as possible, and if appropriate, intervention organised. Once additional support of any kind is in place it is closely monitored to ensure that it is effective and adjusted as the student makes progress.

Autism Statement

All students at LVS Oxford have a primary diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The underlying principles in the support we provide for students are the same, regardless of where they fall on the spectrum.

1.1   Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with and relates to other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them.

1.2   ASD is a spectrum condition, which means that while all people with autism share certain challenges, their condition affects each of them in different ways. People with autism are also more likely than neurotypical people to experience over or under sensitivity to sensory input (sound, taste, smell, touch, light/colour and to know where their body is in space). Alexithymia, the inability to recognise and monitor one's emotions is also prevalent in those with an ASD diagnosis

1.3   Students at LVS Oxford have a primary diagnosis of ASD but many have co-morbid diagnoses such as ADHD, OCD, dyslexia or dyscalculia

This policy sets out the support provided for our students through an awareness of the following considerations:

a. Structure/organisation of activities and resources/routines
b. Physical environment
c. Sensory differences
d. Communication
e. Curriculum
f. Teaching and Learning
g. Behaviour support
h. Understanding the challenges

A. Structure

In KS3 classes, a highly structured approach is followed, including personalised timetables, individual work areas where needed, physical activity and a commitment to engaging with the interest of the student in order to enable them to access the learning experiences offered. The level of structure is agreed with the student so that they are aware of the rationale for the intervention – "you have an individual work area so that you can focus on your work". In KS4 and Post 16, we encourage students to self-evaluate their requirements for structure and support them in adopting a more mainstream learning style with movement between subjects and 'hot desking' rather than an individual learning space. Some students will always require the level of structure in place in the lower age groups and for these individuals, we offer a life skills/vocational pathway.

Rationale:

When so much of life is confusing and unpredictable to our students, it is essential to provide certainty in order to reduce anxiety. Having an ASD diagnosis means that every aspect of life can feel unpredictable and threatening and it is important that we provide a daily routine that is predictable. Many individuals with an ASD diagnosis experience gestalt processing – the tendency to process everything as a whole; they find it difficult to distinguish the separate parts that make up that whole. This means that, for example, when viewing a room, they cannot distinguish individual objects from background, or from each other, so a small change in the room makes it an entirely new and unfamiliar room. This is why some individuals with autism like rooms to be very tidy and everything to stay in the same place.

The same applies to routine. When one part of the routine changes, the person with autism does not have our ability to perceive that part as entirely separate from all other parts of the routine. Add to this the difficulty to forward think and plan, and you have a person who cannot predict what impact the change or amended routine will have on them or when things will go back to normal, provoking high levels of anxiety.

Imagine how this level of anxiety feels every time you have to change an activity, engage socially with someone else, travel to and from school, a new person enters the room, or a staff member is off sick. This is why we have to do everything we can to provide some degree of routine and structure, to reduce anxiety levels and support our students to access the daily curriculum

The curriculum and processes of the day are modified to ensure each individual knows what is going to happen and what is expected of them. The use of personal timetables enables students to feel secure and cope with changes that may or may not have been predicted. This also aids the development of flexibility of thought by reducing dependence on rigid routines, enabling students to plan for change and adapt to different experiences. Staff should clearly indicate to students where a change is happening to their timetable or routine by highlighting it and explaining it to the student. Some students may also require transition cards to move around the school.

Students with autism need structure to be in place throughout the day. Generally, they struggle with the concept of free time and self-occupying. It is essential to teach this vital skill but this does not simply happen by giving students free time. Structured reward time is perfectly acceptable; giving choices between concrete activities is also useful but saying that a student can "do what you like" is unhelpful. Students will need direction and support to access play/leisure activities and staff must be mindful both of students retreating into preferred obsessional activities which may be isolating and counter-productive (computer games are an example), or students struggling to access activities alongside others.

> Rationale:
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> Individuals with autism struggle with making generalisations and do not like uncertainties, which is usually linked to difficulties with generalisation. Generalisation is what enables us to form categories – things that are different but have the key similarities in common, and this underpins a lot of cognition. If there is a session on the last day of term where the teacher hasn't quite decided what to do called 'choice', most children will form a subconscious category of likely activities and will be able to predict that they may do art, play some board games or have some computer time. Individuals with autism are less likely to be able to narrow down the likely activities from all the activities they have done at school so may think that 'choice' may include activities such as on off-site trip, a football match, having an external artist in, a special science day etc. Telling someone with autism to "do what you like for 15 minutes" can lead to huge anxiety, particularly if what the individual likes is trampolining and there is no trampoline in school.

B. Physical Environment

Individuals with ASD learn best when the environment is calm and ordered in such a way so as to reduce anxiety and aid concentration. There should be as few distractions as possible with specific areas within the classroom designated for specific activities and specialist teaching rooms for sessions such as Food Technology. Classroom displays should consider the need for the environment to be calm and not so excessively stimulating so as to distract students from being able to focus on the task in hand. However, within reason it is important to challenge the boundaries and tolerances of students to enable them to develop flexibility of thought and change within the environment, particularly in the KS4 and Post 16 classes.

Attention should be paid to the potential for sensory processing difficulties and to address this, designated staff will carry out a classroom audit twice a year. Sensory processing difficulties may result in increased anxiety and challenge for individual students and may mean that the position of the interactive whiteboard or displays need to be adapted for the particular cohort of a class. Staff should pay particular attention to aversive or distracting stimuli such as noise levels, colour schemes, odours and clutter.

Full use of the outside spaces is expected for those students who may require additional space to manage their own behaviour as well as for those who require sensory movement breaks. Any student who has an agreed time out space will have this identified on their Wellbeing Plan.

> Rationale:
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> Cluttered areas change on a daily basis – today there may be work trays on a table, tomorrow a member of staff's coffee cup, and the following day another student's jumper. Such changes raise anxiety levels and inhibit students' ability to identify the use of a particular area.
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> When asking students to move to a particular area in the room (such as a table to do some practical work) do not say "go to the table" – ensure you are very specific "go to the table with the red work tray on".

C. Sensory Considerations

Students may have additional sensory processing difficulties and may need additional processing time if sensory distractions are present. Some individuals with ASD may require additional sensory stimulation or sensory reduction techniques in order to aid concentration and enable them to access learning. We support students to meet these sensory needs in an appropriate way with the support of the Occupational Therapy team and the therapy assistant. Staff should build these sensory considerations into their planning and

ensure that the curriculum and routines of the day are sufficiently flexible to meet these needs. This may mean that movement breaks are appropriate at certain times of the day or that students have individual OT sessions.

Staff should be mindful that sensory integration difficulties could have a significant effect on the ability of a student to access the curriculum. It is the responsibility of staff to be creative in finding ways to overcome this, not only through programmes devised by the OT team but through the adaptation of activities and resources to ensure that the learning objective can be met. Sensory integration difficulties must not be allowed to become a barrier to learning.

Rationale:

The way an autistic person processes information is by giving all stimuli equal priority; this requires the brain to handle an overwhelming flood of sensory information. The neurotypical brain is able to identify and ignore irrelevant stimuli and focus valuable attention on that which is task-relevant creating a much more efficient processing system. The autistic brain, on the other hand, takes it all in and then must actively discard irrelevant information at a later processing stage causing, in effect, a processing bottleneck. Imagine going for a job interview; when you walk into the interview room the interviewer has on a perfume with an overwhelming smell which gives you a headache. The heating is on full blast and makes you feel uncomfortably hot and thirsty and there is no water in the room. Your new shoes are too tight and pinching your feet. The phone in the room keeps ringing throughout the interview but is left unanswered. The interviewer has a mobile phone next to them which, although on silent, keeps flashing and vibrating with an incoming call. On top of all this, you need to go to the toilet. Trying to concentrate in this situation would be incredibly hard but these are the types of sensory stimuli that our students are trying to overcome on a regular basis.

For someone with autism, new clothing can feel like needles on their skin. Labels in clothing can be a constant irritant. A lawnmower can be deafening and ceiling lights blinding. The smell of a food technology room, the dining hall or a toilet can be nauseating. Trying to sit still for long periods of time can be impossible. These sensory processing difficulties must be recognised and addressed in order to support students to access learning and daily life.

D. Communication

Staff should remember that experiencing communication difficulties is a key part of being on the autistic spectrum. When in a heightened state of anxiety, students with autism will require visual support in order to enable them to process what is being asked of them and some will also require support to enable them to effectively communicate their needs and wishes. Even students with seemingly well-developed language skills may struggle to use this language in a functional way and may also find it hard to follow verbal instructions unless they are broken down into small steps and/or supported with visual clues. The key principles below support effective communication:

- Keep your verbal instructions to a minimum
- Slow down and keep quiet – many students need processing time (15-20 seconds is not unusual). Repeating the question or saying it louder will only cause the student to struggle to process the original information
- Always expect acceptable communication from our students – we are preparing them for life and they need to be able to communicate their needs, wishes and opinions in an acceptable way
- Many students with an autism diagnosis interpret what is said literally. For example, asking a student to 'take a seat' may leave them wondering where to take it – instead, say 'sit here'.

> Rationale:
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> Imagine being on holiday in a country where very few people speak English. You may have a very basic understanding of the language spoken but you need people to slow down when they speak to you; you need people to be patient as you struggle to ask questions fluently; you need visual clues such as familiar symbols on signposts or pictures on menus; you need to be able to interpret people's body language and facial expression; you need to be able to put things into context to understand what people are saying so you need to recognise if you've walked into the foyer of a theatre, the entrance to a leisure centre or the information area at a train station by generalising what you know about these places. Without these clues and supports, communication can be extremely limited and your day-to-day experience can become uncertain, confusing and overwhelming; your anxiety levels will increase enormously. This is likely to be the experience of someone with autism.

E. Curriculum

The curriculum is tailored to best meet the needs of the students, enable them to engage with learning activities, develop flexibility of thought, independent thinking skills, acquire nationally recognised qualifications, can live as independently as possible and be employable. As students progress throughout Key Stages 4 and Post 16, where possible, the scaffolding/level of support is gradually reduced or removed as students prepare for life in a world which is not autism aware. However, the commitment to personalised learning pathways, aspirational curriculum targets and emotional and physical wellbeing remain at the core of the curriculum for our students.

Students with autism experience difficulties in generalising learning from one situation to another. Using plastic coins to buy a pretend item does not support a student to gain key life skills. Teaching a student to use real coinage in a shop to buy a product that they have chosen is far more effective, even if the 'shop' is the Café at school.

Staff should use the curriculum as a vehicle for developing the core values of independence and employability leading to caring, confident citizens who are contributing members of their community. These values are as important as curriculum content. Students should follow programmes that are developed according to their need, which may mean additional therapy sessions, community skills or additional learning activities.

> Rationale:
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> Current research indicates that 16% of autistic people are in full time employment (National Autistic Society). We are preparing our students for further studying or employment. Some students may volunteer in their chosen field of employment prior to gaining paid part-time or full time placements. Providing anxiety reduction strategies and exercise programmes can improve social functioning and decrease stereotypical behaviours for individuals with autism, both of which have been noted as barriers to inclusion in the workplace.

F. Teaching and Learning

In addition to the core standards and expectations set out in the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy, staff should keep their understanding of autism at the forefront of their minds when planning lessons and supporting learning. This means that consideration should be given to:
- The length of activities and the ability of students to concentrate on the learning objective
- The construction of groups and the balance between individual and group work

- The amount of verbal input throughout the lesson
- Sensory issues which may mean accessing learning is difficult
- Opportunities for physical activities throughout the day
- The importance of making activities functional and meaningful – ensure the relevance of the task is clear for the students
- Using the student's individual interests as motivators
- The importance of structure and routine throughout the day as well as the need for continuity and consistency of staffing
- Visual supports to aid understanding
- Activities which encourage the development of flexibility of thought, challenging students' routines in a managed way in order to develop acceptance of change
- Developing social understanding, not only in supporting students to know how to act appropriately in social situations but to understand why this response is appropriate.

> Rationale:
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> Learning targets should incorporate targets that address the core deficits of autism – communication and social interaction; flexibility of thought.

G. Behaviour Support

Students have a Student Profile which details environmental challenges, anxiety provoking situations, potential unexpected behaviour and the appropriate prevention and response. Staff must always ask themselves why an unexpected behaviour has occurred and take steps to introduce measures that may prevent this behaviour from re- occurring. This may take time and may not always be initially successful but consistency and continuity are essential in order to support students to better manage their own behaviour. Staff should also be reflective on their own part in the incident and consider whether their response triggered or intensified the response of the student.

Principles to help support students with autism to manage their behaviour include:

- Ensure that students have an effective method of communicating that they need time out
- Ensure that you have an understanding of the sensory needs of the students you work with and enable these needs to be met
- Ensure that the environment, curriculum and approach are modified to reduce anxiety levels
- Keep language to a minimum and use visuals to support what you are saying
- Be aware of the de-escalation and prevention strategies that are relevant for the students you work with
- Always reward positive behaviour and deliver a reward if you have promised it.

H. Understanding the Challenges

Approach the teaching of students with autism from an empathetic perspective. Knowing what it is that motivates or interests them, but equally, knowing what may increase anxiety levels. Making every effort to understand and relate to the experience of the person with autism will underpin our attempts to develop independent students who have strategies to manage their anxiety levels. This requires staff to remain calm and as far as possible, act in a predictable manner. Staff should always respond to challenging situations in an analytical manner, asking what is at the root cause of a behaviour in order to proactively plan to prevent it in the future.

Rationale:

Imagine that your neighbour insists on parking halfway across your driveway. You have seethed about it for weeks and finally resolve to address it with them. Storming out onto the driveway when they've just got home carrying their shopping with their child crying in the pushchair is likely to lead to confrontation and fail to resolve the situation. You are far more likely to get a positive outcome if you approach them in a calm manner and they are far more likely to be receptive to you if they too are feeling calm. Try to understand why they might be parking there – is it easier to get their child from the car? Do they struggle to park in small spaces? Has their car been damaged before? Is there anything that you can do to make it easier for them to park in their own space – by moving your wheelie bin, for example? The same can be said of unexpected or contextually inappropriate behaviour. Try to understand why it is happening and put measures in place to resolve the issues. A student who refuses to wash their hands after using the toilet may hate the noise of the hand drier.

I. Continuing Staff Development/Staff Information Resource

There is a great deal of expertise within the staff teams at LVS Oxford. Speak to your line manager who will advise of the best person to refer to depending on your query (OT, SaLT, Educational Psychologist). There are a number of reference books in the staff room and the publications and websites below offer a range of information:

National Autistic Society – www.autism.org.uk
Autism Education Trust – www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk
Network Autism – www.network.autism.org.uk

A Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome – Tony Attwood
Asperger's Syndrome – A guide for Parents and Professionals – Tony Attwood
Sensory Perceptual Issues in Autism Spectrum Conditions – Olga Bogdashina The Autistic Spectrum – Jill Boucher

Authors with ASD (there are many more, but these are a starting point)

Wendy Lawson
Donna Williams
Sarah Hendrickx
Temple Grandin
Luke Jackson