The Holmewood School Autism Practice Guide
Updated 2019-2020

This guidance has been produced to highlight the principles of best practice for educating students with autism at The Holmewood School, with our specific cohort of students in mind. Further information can be found in the school policies. Everything in this booklet is what is expected from all staff working in our specialist autism school.

Section 1: Environment

Section 2: Communication

Section 3: Teaching and learning

Section 4: Student support

Section 5: Summary checklist

Section 1: Environment

Classrooms are where students spend the majority of their time at school, and should be orderly and predictable. An environment which is tidy and where visual information is kept to a manageable level, helps students to remain regulated and organised.

- Classrooms should include clearly demarcated areas for group learning, individual learning, storage, etc.
- Workstations should be available for individual work, which can range from quiet areas separated by room dividers, to a labelled table. These places should be kept tidy and remain consistent for students to use:

- Chairs and tables should be as uniform as possible in terms of colour and type, and should be suitable for the size of students:
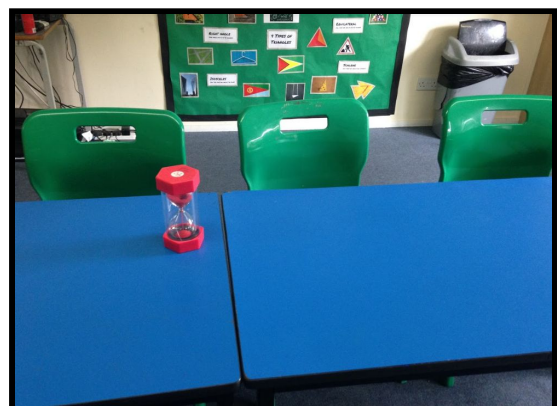
- There should be low arousal areas in each classroom, particularly around workstations where excessive visual information may impede students' learning:


- Classrooms should have clear spaces for students to store their belongings, such as lockers or tubs at workstations or pegs:

- Clutter should be reduced as far as possible, which includes shutting away unused items, keeping cupboard doors closed, keeping personal items out of sight, and keeping student and staff desks clear and tidy.

- Students may need to regulate themselves through the use of sensory items. A labelled sensory box should be available to students in every classroom, to provide a range of sensory items including fiddles:
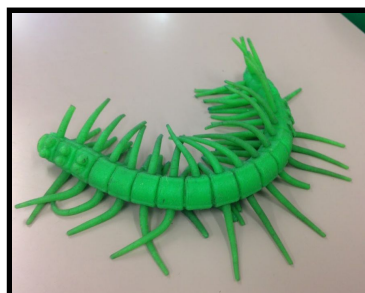
- Additional items may be suitable for some classrooms to help students to remain calm and focused. These include fiddle cushions, therapy balls, yoga mats, weighted jackets and calming areas in classrooms:
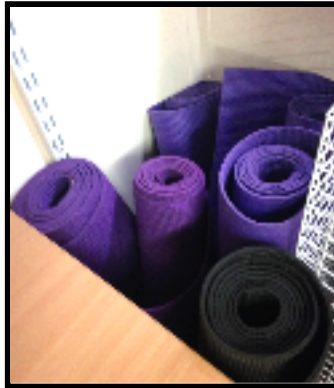
- Ear defenders should be available in the classroom for students to use.
- Further advice on the use of items to support sensory regulation can be provided by the Occupational Therapy team.
- Resources for learning should be kept in clearly labelled and organised areas, so that students know where to access them:

- Sensory factors which may adversely affect students include noise, heat and smells.
  - Classroom doors should be kept shut where possible, to reduce outside noise.
  - Staff should be mindful of the amount of noise created in the classroom, such as through playing music and videos (pre-warn the students if this is unavoidable). Loud noises and a wide variety of noises (including multiple voices) are often difficult for students to manage.
  - Classrooms should be kept ventilated and at a comfortable temperature.
  - Strong smells such as smelly food and perfumes should be avoided.

- Displays should be used sparingly in classrooms, so as to reduce the risk of too much visual information.
  - Display borders and background colours should be the **same** throughout the classroom and throughout the school.
    - Noticeboard (yellow)
    - Student work display (blue)
    - ZoR (green)
    - Achievements (optional - pink/purple)
    - Changes board (this could be on your big whiteboard or on a separate one)
  - Notices and other visual information should be contained within display borders.
  - Displays should use similar fonts (Comfortaa) and colours throughout. Edit the premade titles and labels on this documents:
    - https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1OuLE8GbqyczVgARQGeTYZx8u9kqdurNgHspBBAMG2nw/edit
  - Displays should contain useful information to support learning, and where possible should also include student work. A notice-board and Zones of Regulation (ZofR) notice-board are essential.
  - Displays should be orderly and not too visually 'busy':

- ZofR notice board should be individualised and personalised to each class to ensure it reflects the needs of the students in it. However it does need to incorporate the consistent resources that have been provided to the 'ambassadors' to ensure continuity across the school.
  Link to ZofR document:

The ZONES of Regulation®

BLUE ZONE	GREEN ZONE	YELLOW ZONE	RED ZONE
Sad	Happy	Frustrated	Mad/Angry
Sick	Calm	Worried	Terrified
Tired	Feeling Okay	Silly/Wiggly	Yelling/Hitting
Bored	Focused	Excited	Elated
Moving Slowly	Ready to Learn	Loss of Some Control	Out of Control

Regulation tool

- Individual student timetables should be displayed within classrooms in a way that students can access and understand. These should include each student's individual therapy sessions. This may include providing a simpler, student-friendly version of a timetable which includes visuals:

- Each form room should have an announcements board for displaying information about the day, including therapies, timetable changes and events. Information should be written clearly and updated daily. The announcements board should have a clear border and be the same colour in each class, to highlight that it is important information.
- This announcements board should be separate from the classroom whiteboard.
- Laptops and Chromebooks should be stowed in the designated charging area whenever they are not in use:

- Most classrooms have a wipeable whiteboard, which should be used to support learning in lessons. In order to help students access the relevant information, the board should **only** be used to support learning, and should not contain other information such as staff notes. The whiteboard should be in a place where students can see and staff can access it.
- The area around the whiteboards in a classroom should be kept completely clear of visual information, to reduce distractions.
- Corridors and spaces outside classrooms should be kept tidy and clear of excessive information. The same display guidelines apply to these spaces as in classrooms:

Section 2: Communication

Effective communication and an understanding of how autism affects communication is central to providing a suitable education for students with autism. Paying attention to individual students' needs and abilities, and making adjustments accordingly will have a significant impact on students' well being and ability to learn. Further guidance can be provided by the Speech and Language Therapy team.

- Staff should be conscious of their use of voice and language, including:
  - Speaking at a steady rate and volume
  - Knowing when it's useful not to speak, e.g. when a student should solve a problem themselves; when another adult is already speaking; when gestures or visuals may be more appropriate; or when a student is not in an emotional state to process verbal information
  - Allowing additional time for students to process and answer questions
  - Avoiding unnecessary repetition or rephrasing of questions or information
  - Maintaining a calm voice, especially if a student is in crisis
  - Not shouting except when there is an imminent danger (e.g. crossing the road without looking)
  - Chunking information and instructions into manageable partaking
  - Reducing the number of verbal clauses and instructions to a manageable level
  - Saying a student's name and ensuring you have their attention before making a request
  - Being conscious of the risks around figurative language (e.g. metaphors or indirect requests), and generally favouring clear and unambiguous language
  - Using 'first' and 'next' language, e.g. "First coat on, then playing outside"
  - Avoiding possible negative trigger words such as "no" and "don't", and using more positive instructions that you would like to see, e.g. "Hands down", "Good walking, thank you"
  - Use of the word "finished" instead of "stop"

- Staff should use visual cues to reinforce instructions and information, such as symbols for good listening, independent work or for reinforcing specific targets. Visuals can be held by individual staff members, kept on student desks and displayed around the classroom:
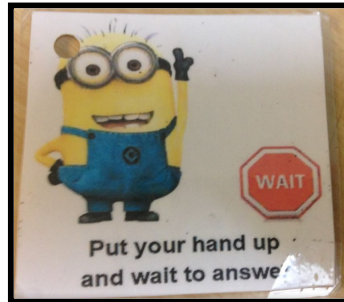
- Questioning should be used to promote understanding, such as:
  - Differentiated questions for students, reflecting topics of learning
  - Open questions to elicit deeper consideration of topics
  - Written questions, such as in marking or on the board
  - The opportunity for students to ask and discuss questions together, such as in lesson starters and circle times
  - Attempts to answer questions and contribute to lessons should be supported by staff
- Staff should provide regular opportunities for students to work together, such as through group discussion, games, and problem-solving and investigation activities.
- Staff should explain the order and structure of activities, which can be done verbally but can also be supported through providing a checklist for students, so they know what to expect.
- Students should be prepared for changes as much as possible, such as through the classroom announcements board.

Section 3: Teaching and learning

Teaching takes place by all staff at all stages of the day. The way in which students learn will be affected by their autism in a wide variety of ways, and it is important to know what each student's abilities and needs are, and to adjust teaching accordingly. Students' learning profiles are often 'spiky' and 'unique', meaning they may excel in certain areas of work and have significant difficulties in others.

- Lessons should be planned and delivered in a way which is suitable for the needs and abilities of the class, particularly with their autism in mind. A student's chronological age is **not** an indicator of the level of work they are able to access, as the abilities of our students range considerably.

- Teachers should use the THSL autism friendly lesson template in **ALL** lessons: https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1-g5wzTlbr5i5j56i_NatBSVwxAii-aytAl4a7ixPTx0/edit#slide=id.g60c509f740_0_0 (please make a copy) and should follow expectations outlined in teacher training on 1st May 2019 https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1PJLlWFRX1rWoPTAVQt-is_yiVd_GoRDfoqkviReZavs/edit#slide=id.g56bf3eeca7_0_0

- Planning should take into account **individual students' needs**, such as additional adult support and the modelling and practise of terminology.

- Students may find it difficult to apply learning and to retain it. It is necessary to provide opportunities for applying learning in a range of contexts such as through **investigation activities,** and to refresh and practise learning as needed.

- Students may find it difficult to sit still and listen to a lot of information, so staff should be mindful about the amount of information they provide and for how long students are expected to listen.

- Students should spend the majority of lessons working rather than listening.

- Students' learning can be supported by displaying key information and instructions, such as visual symbols and lists of instructions within lessons.

- Practical activities which include students moving, interacting with one another, and using their hands are useful ways of promoting learning and should be provided regularly.

- Students benefit from the ability to request and be given breaks from learning, which can include movement and sensory breaks. Staff should be mindful about how best to provide these, and encourage students to identify when they need

them. The Occupational Therapy team can provide further guidance on such support.

- All students should have a morning and afternoon circle time with their form teacher, teaching assistants and fellow students. The THSL autism friendly template should be used in every form time: https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1qlAidc3N0rPhM_1Y4MH16ZBxzJYK_Bpin-q McgLeCg4/edit#slide=id.g5471e5ecc0_1_34 (please make a copy)

- Circle time should be used to:
  - Discuss the events of the coming day, including lessons, therapies and changes
  - Remind students of important information such as their targets
  - Allow students to practise speaking and listening, such as sharing their activities from the night before
  - Discuss the events of the day before starting reward time
  - Reflecting on what has gone well and students' progress towards their targets
  - Reflecting on what has been difficult during the day (which may be best done away from the group)
  - Discussing positives and areas for development in their day including colour of day.

- Teaching assistants have a crucial role in the learning and wellbeing of students. Central principles around the role of the TA include:
  - Recognising when students may need additional support, such as a break or additional help to understand a task
  - Breaking down activities for students, such as providing a checklist (even if this is just done on a small individual whiteboard)
  - Supporting teaching in lessons, including directing students' attention to the teacher
  - Being conscious of their use of voice, particularly when the teacher is talking and has given an instruction to a student, e.g. reducing verbal language in the classroom
  - Modelling enthusiasm and enjoyment of learning
  - Addressing individual students' needs, such as providing a quiet space to talk or to process emotions

- Staff should provide opportunities throughout the day for students to work independently and to solve problems by themselves. This may require staff to

clearly model that an independent task is taking place, and to provide activities which students are able to solve with less support.

- Planned sabotage activities such as changing a schedule, introducing a surprise or making certain resources unavailable, can allow students to practise problem-solving skills.
- Transitions between activities and spaces can be difficult for students, as they struggle to adjust to a new set of expectations and information. Transitions can be supported by:
  - Providing time warnings for activity changes
  - Using timers (e.g. sand or digital)
  - Using verbal countdowns
  - Using familiar routines such as tidying up or lining up before and after lessons
  - Allowing extra time within lessons for students to move between activities
  - Reducing the number of transitions where possible

Section 4: Student support

The way in which we support students throughout their school day is central to their progress, learning and wellbeing. Positive relationships with staff make a huge difference to students, who have often had negative school experiences before joining us. More information and support can be provided by Ms Lempaszek (Head of Welfare and Behaviour) or Ms D'Silva (Assistant Head).

- Students may experience significant difficulty in regulating and managing their emotional state, and in processing information and events. They often need time and support from staff to work such difficulties through. Staff should refer to the Zones of Regulation and support them to use their strategies to get back to the green zone.
- Following a difficult incident, staff should take time to listen to students and provide them with support to understand what happened, identify their feelings, reflect, and to repair any relationships. This is needed for those *witnessing* a difficult incident as well as those *involved* in one.
- Strategies which support the resolution of a crisis situation include:
  - The visual storyboarding of events
  - Helping students to identify their feelings
  - Providing a quiet space to calm
  - Remaining calm and non-judgmental
  - Restorative justice meetings
- Staff should take the time to hear what students have to say, and not assume they know how they are feeling or what is best.
- During and following a crisis, students are likely to be in a heightened state of anxiety and arousal, during which it is harder for them to process and regulate their feelings. Staff should:
  - Use a calm and level voice
  - Reduce the use of voices and the complexity of language
  - Wait until students are calm enough before addressing consequences to behaviour
  - Give simple directions and choices to students
  - Make use of low-arousal spaces
  - Avoid inflections of anger or irritation

- Staff should model positive social interactions and play with students, such as introducing and taking part in games, avoiding over-competitive behaviour, celebrating effort and promoting turn-taking.
- Families are key team members in the support of students. Staff should keep in regular contact with parents and carers, and work together with them, such as extending support strategies between home and school and making positive phone calls home.
- Rewards help to motivate and reinforce positive behaviours such as trying hard and asking for help. Rewards should be used consciously, and should reflect the positive behaviours you want to see - not just academic success. Rewards should be clearly explained and modelled to students, and whilst they should be fair and consistent, it is also possible to differentiate them for students depending on their needs and abilities.
- There are a wide range of therapies available for students at the school, which staff should support students to attend and take a positive and active interest in. Strategies and information should be shared between therapists and other staff, as appropriate, to support students. Further information can be provided by the school therapy team.
- Social understanding is an area of particular difficulty for many students. Staff should not assume students will understand social rules and conventions, so these may need to be clearly modeled and practised.
- School should be a place of individuality, where students can feel at home and comfortable being themselves. This includes allowing students to enjoy their areas of interest, and not drawing undue attention to their differences.

Section 5: Summary checklist

Self-awareness and self-development are central to supporting students with autism. The following is a checklist to support staff reflection and improvement of their personal practice:

- ❏ Have I ensured that the learning environment is orderly, tidy and conducive to learning for students with autism?
- ❏ Have I provided for sensory differences such as sensory items and the classroom environment?
- ❏ Are displays relevant, orderly and autism-friendly?
- ❏ Does my classroom enable the students to organise themselves?
- ❏ Would I be happy for a parent or inspector to visit my classroom?
- ❏ Are my interactions with students positive, professional and supportive?
- ❏ Am I giving students enough time to process and respond to information?
- ❏ Would I be happy for a parent or inspector to observe my interaction with this student?
- ❏ Am I communicating in a way that students can understand clearly?
- ❏ Am I providing opportunities for students to interact positively with their peers?
- ❏ Have I provided visual information to support students' understanding?
- ❏ Am I promoting students' independence wherever possible?
- ❏ Am I allowing students to move and engage in practical activities?
- ❏ Am I using rewards to motivate and reinforce positive behaviours?
- ❏ Am I supporting students to identify when they need a break?
- ❏ Am I taking a non-judgemental approach and really listening to what the student is telling me?
- ❏ Am I remaining calm in a crisis?
- ❏ Am I checking-in with myself and responding to my own needs and well being?
- ❏ Am I seeking and using the support and advice of other staff?

Copies of all templates/checklists etc (please laminate so they look neat and last)

1. Basic Autism/Teaching Practice Checklist:
   https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ny4HoxjUPpIhX_ion6iwJKeEllZ9Sa_fRQtbgi8uSZ8/edit

2. Form Time Checklist:
   https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Lj0yiVHkl4JfZLjCavNJZALhtBwC7e4f7NnypxqBbCg/edit

3. THSL autism friendly lesson template:
   https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1-g5wzTlbr5i5j56i_NatBSVwxAii-aytAl4a7ixPTx0/edit#slide=id.g60c509f740_0_0

4. THSL autism friendly form time template:
   https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1qlAidc3N0rPhM_1Y4MH16ZBxzJYK_Bpin-qMcgLeCg4/edit#slide=id.g5471e5ecc0_1_34

5. ZoR Display Board heading:
   https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1bHP_Uf0LupYVAS5P9TG9fFjc_0foP-52WV3VeZav8ow/edit#slide=id.p and key visual:
   https://docs.google.com/document/d/1rx4yQTJVKPxdB1-_CjPfRDsv3b96PELCDS_f9ti7G7g/edit

6. Noticeboard title:
   https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1gBYodiYvP2gXn_Og5vR6yTDJYxwWoB8w8QrbB4FUeP0/edit#slide=id.p

7. Display boards template (new Jan 2020, in progress):
   https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1OuLE8GbqyczVgARQGeTYZx8u9kqdurNgHspBBAMG2nw/edit#slide=id.p

8. Changes board heading:
   https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1bHP_Uf0LupYVAS5P9TG9fFjc_0foP-52WV3VeZav8ow/edit#slide=id.p

9. Student work displays (changed text as necessary):
   https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1ShSQGIxCCpV3HkDUpKTWUnFI1_SCSakatyrk7WmkjJU/edit#slide=id.p

10. Labels for storage - Secondary:
    https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-M9q-2xUoMZFJI7umWf0Qow3BVuQ5CgEBStknmuYulw/edit

11. Labels for storage - Primary:
    https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Snph_21NYR4FOwzEPEzoieXQlnZnerTle0-_7UE_JMk/edit

12. Displays font:

    https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZGxwkWFZn1FUbsmFABj3gUg78Dp9ZGvHFYfJG2-US9U/edit

    12. Workstation label:

    https://docs.google.com/document/d/16yYMnuxQLtPRugMrHUs66dgY9VrCYBgBN4To0WAEYjE/edit

13. Labels for lockers:

    https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WCQcoqjPCoJGdcesKHTJWX5Im9CMfVUSP4Jvo6pE4xQ/edit

14. Lesson in progress sign:

    https://docs.google.com/document/d/1r1vjQSL5KIIAbCghdECmp1ygngS6E4tulh_OkcKqSVU/edit

15. Piccadilly door sign:

    https://docs.google.com/document/d/1lPWLZHpnzmwnpCkaCY1XytMvJaDYWNSTgEEzAYKlYag/edit

16. District door sign:

    https://docs.google.com/document/d/1QWgv-6evITlqsDZ6oTTBhc4HhRZ8F58Pi92jZf_NUJ8/edit

17. Northern door sign:

    https://drive.google.com/open?id=1gLxu8NTbNNJt5nAK6iwDPz0iaooHITdkaYlZoS6PrBY

18. Bakerloo door sign:

    https://docs.google.com/document/d/1C1sHCtf3ZZbaOZJHi8rf7evVOeeZ9yLayHdcA9scUGk/edit

19. Victoria door sign:

    https://docs.google.com/document/d/1o0i2JRBSt-dahBxG-NekDHo-X0IAIu2ZU3t9RHV7Z7A/edit

20. Metropolitan door sign:

    https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1lsbtgl3r2eY1PjgzeC33oB_ja4kU-oUxShj67STXS9w/edit

21. Central door sign:

    https://docs.google.com/document/d/1jBKE8WkC5-rYKJX63sPYdjYHocaqu-CW--Tz245202I/edit

22. Elizabeth door sign:

    https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Y-wQohOkZBhHlfaUpoAhL29ibxcj1JB251yhi-HOmPl/edit

23. Circle door sign:

    https://docs.google.com/document/d/1w22v4OVHoy7A82H3zEox4Hp7J2z51HCMR8Uh80b-zus/edit

<u>THSL CLASSROOM LAYOUT</u>

1. **Furniture:** All chairs should be the same colour and size.0

2. **Z of R display: Green** freeze paper with black border. Use Z of R heading template and this visual:
   https://docs.google.com/document/d/1rx4yQTJVKPxdB1-_CjPfRDsv3b96PELCDS_f9ti7G7g/edit

3. **Student work displays: Blue** freeze paper with black border. All work to be dated and cut neatly with guillotine. Use student work heading template.

4. **Notice-board: Yellow** freeze paper with black border. **Every noticeboard should have:**

-Noticeboard heading   -Safeguarding visual   -Any **current** notices

-Childline poster

https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/childline-posters-wallet-cards/

-Gold and green behaviours charts

https://docs.google.com/document/d/18l7pukhrrgQRvsBF8UQVC7HDDcx5GKGq5Iq_KQNOY-E/edit

-Confidential anti-bullying number and email

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1LmM04R5yC4h6R4LT6xCBlu4yQozwuo-3JTDkammlurU/edit

-Reward system visual   -Anti Bullying visual

5. **Optional Class boards (for achievements etc): Lilac** freeze paper with black border.

-Current student photos

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1ldXBO9BUd-le4sF5yvdHQjiBVWcevxiY8pO-fop10UU/edit#slide=id.p

-Current student certificates

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1o0oaQGv5aoYK6mOSRrRXXEYsmIVTxdVH3CGQxxtO0RM/edit#slide=id.p

-Individual achievements

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1jD-dfS4FAD81p77aiH09W56_6Pm2geiWSDq4K5xDtsQ/edit#slide=id.p

6. **Workstations** should be labelled with student names using template and have:

-Individual student timetables (including therapies)

-Key IEP targets

-Any relevant visuals

6. **Tidy stationery cupboard** (labelled with label templates) to increase student independence.

7. **All folders/cardboard storage folders/student workbooks etc** should be labelled by class/level and be stored in closed cupboards. All book cases should be tidy.

7. **Class Bag** containing labelled student pencil cases.

8. Labelled box/bag with **sensory toys** if needed.

9. Class sign on the door to show your students and class team (see template)

There should be NO other notices, rubbish or clutter in the classroom. This is to ensure the classroom is AUTISM FRIENDLY for our students.

Displays should be neat and look professional. Please use a guillotine and any text should be typed in comforta. Text should NOT be hand-written.