



Charlton Park Academy

Autism Policy

In response to a whole-school invitation, a working group was formed with representatives from teachers across various pathways and key stages, as well as therapists and support staff. The group have met on three separate occasions. Additional consultations occurred with the school therapy teams, CENMAC and external consultants. The experts' knowledge and experiences contributed to the development of the policy. We thank all who were involved in the process.

In collaboration with:

- teaching staff at Charlton Park Academy

Consulted with:

- Occupational Therapy Team at Charlton Park Academy
- Speech and Language Team at Charlton Park Academy
- CENMAC
- Saffron Gallup (National Autistic Society Adviser)
- Sue Piper (TEACCH Consultant, Head of Prior's Court)

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SCHOOL VISION

Core values: Communicate, Persevere and Achieve.

These values permeate every aspect of our teaching and learning environment, guiding our students towards meaningful engagement with their education and community.

There is a vital connection between students' aspirations, needs, outcomes, and the provision outlined in their Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). By embedding the Preparation for Adulthood outcomes into the curriculum design, we empower our students with the skills, knowledge, and experience necessary for a successful transition to adulthood and meaningful participation in society.

Our mission is to empower our students to achieve ambitious outcomes, building on their strengths and interests, while addressing their individual needs through personalised pathways. We provide each student with the life skills they need to become as independent and confident as possible through each stage of their life's journey.

OUR AIMS

Our main aim is to provide a wide range of creative, fun, meaningful educational experiences and opportunities to enrich our students' lives, promoting the highest possible academic achievement to meet their identified need, developing independent life and social communication skills.

Our curriculum is dynamic, responsive, and adapted to meet the diverse needs of our students. It is centred on our vision of "Preparing our students for adult life," ensuring they are equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary for successful transitions into post-16 education, vocational courses, college, supported internships, volunteering, training, or employment. Early intervention and lateral progression play a fundamental role in achieving ambitious outcomes into adulthood. It is designed to foster autonomy, self-regulation, and independence, ensuring that every student can lead a satisfying and fulfilled life and become as independent as possible.

We strive to be responsive to each learner's needs, building on individual strengths and interests. Everything we do is through personalised learning and supports students as individuals, incorporating their individual needs, interests and ways of learning.

Our curriculum is ambitious and designed to enable active participation and inclusion in community facilities so students can interact with adults in everyday situations, with growing confidence and resilience. By supporting the young people in the community, we are teaching social skills, appropriate behaviour and how to practice rules that have been taught.

OTHER POLICIES

This policy should be read in conjunction with other school policies and curriculum, including:

- Safeguarding Policy
- De-escalation Policy and Protocols
- SEND Policy
- Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy
- Environment Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Communication Policy

OVERVIEW OF AUTISM

What is Autism?

National Autistic Society define autism as a lifelong developmental disability which affects the way an individual communicates and interacts with the world. Autism can affect people differently and areas of difficulty may vary from individual to individual. Like all people, autistic students have their own strengths and needs. Autistic individuals are unique and have their own way of thinking because of neurological differences. Therefore, autistic people are likely to perceive, interpret, process and experience the world differently. They might see, hear and feel the world differently to others. Often people feel that being autistic is a fundamental aspect of their identity.

Please see Annex (page 7) for more information on factors and theories.

At Charlton Park Academy, we promote an understanding of our students' needs and strengths. We provide the right resources to fulfil their learning experiences. There is no cure for autism, there are a number of well researched, evidenced based approaches which are proven to provide autistic students with increased opportunities to access a full, broad and balanced curriculum. In this way, we work in collaboration with families to enable our students to live fully within our society. These approaches can also be successful for students who do not have a diagnosis of autism but display similar characteristics in terms of social communication, sensory processing, executive function and emotional regulation. Fundamentally, our aim is to equip our young people with skills which promote resilience.

TEACHING AND LEARNING APPROACHES

There are four key themes to consider in relation to teaching and learning:

1. Enabling Environment. The learning environment supports any sensory, physical, social, emotional and communication needs of autistic students to optimise learning and participation as well as reduce anxiety and events of emotional dysregulation. This section needs to be read alongside Environment Policy.

- ❖ **Low arousal:** The physical environment has been adapted to meet the needs of autistic students to ensure that each learner knows what is going to happen and what is expected from them. The environment aims to be low arousal or low stimulation rather than no stimulation. In line with this concept, classrooms are designed to be distraction free. For example, displays are meaningful and only used if beneficial for the students.
- ❖ **Zoning:** Organising clearly defined areas in the classrooms for individual and group learning, relaxation and movement.
- ❖ **Structure and visual support:** Presenting the world in a more predictable, accessible and safer place. Structure can aid personal autonomy and independence and plays to the strengths of a sense of order and preferences for visual organisation, commonly associated with autism. Our environment provides a clear structure for students to learn in. Our classes sizes are small and specialised, and all students have access to visual schedules.
- ❖ **The social environment:** Aiming to create opportunities for our students to communicate and socially interact with each other, adults and people in the wider community. It allows the learners to develop communication, self-reliance and functional skills.

- ❖ **Consistency:** Due to the complex learning barriers that the students may experience, we recognise that the learning environment needs to be consistent throughout for the students to navigate and predict their surroundings, be as independent as possible and feel confident and safe. All member of staff take responsibility for adapting and maintaining the environment to suit the needs of the students.

2. The individual student and their strengths. All students will have their individual education needs and aspirations specified in their Education Health Care Plans (EHCP). The "golden thread" signifies an essential link between students' aspirations, needs, outcomes, and the services detailed in their Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). By integrating the Preparation for Adulthood outcomes into the curriculum, we equip our students with the skills, knowledge, and experiences required for a successful transition to adulthood and active engagement in their communities. We aim to help students achieve their full potential by building on their strengths and interests, while addressing their individual needs. We equip each student with the life skills necessary to become as independent and self-assured as possible throughout their life's journey. The provision in the F section specifies the needs and level of support which must be met at Charlton Park Academy in relation to:

- ❖ **Communication:** Understanding and using communication and language.
- ❖ **Cognition:** Addressing difficulties in planning and organisation, working memory, structure and routine, focus attention, problem solving, and learning in class.
- ❖ **Social, Emotional, Mental Health and Wellbeing:** Building positive relationships and friendship, emotional literacy and regulation, how to respond appropriately to social situations, stress and anxiety.
- ❖ **Sensory or Physical:** Differences in the way sensory information is being processed often leads to sensitivities and feeling overwhelmed by the environment or struggling to identify internal sensations such as hunger, pain, personal care needs, heat and body awareness. It should be noted that sensory sensitivities can lead to high level of stress and anxiety as well as feelings of dysregulations.

3. Building positive relationships.

- ❖ Positive and strong relationships between staff and students, based on empathy and understanding on how to support our students' learning and well-being.
- ❖ Collaborating with parents, carers and staff by forming a team around each student.
- ❖ Partnering with external agencies and the local community whilst establishing links and working effectively with them to ensure holistic development of each individual.

4. Curriculum and learning. This section needs to be read in conjunction with Charlton Park Academy Curriculum Intent Statement and Environmental Policy.

Charlton Park Academy devises and provides a bespoke curriculum based on best practice, experience, innovation and research. We adopt practices from TEACCH, Attention Autism, Intensive Interaction. Interoceptive Curriculum and the Zones of Regulation. We have developed a curriculum that captures not only the learning needs of our students but also addresses their social, emotional well-being as

well as physical and personal development through incorporating elements of EYFS (Early Years Foundation Framework) and EQUALS Curriculum.

Preparation for Adulthood

By embedding the Preparation for Adulthood outcomes into the curriculum design, we empower our students with the skills, knowledge, and experience necessary for a successful transition to adulthood and meaningful participation in society. The four main outcomes include:

- ❖ Helping students develop skills and experiences that prepare them for work opportunities suitable to their abilities and interests.
- ❖ Equipping students with practical skills necessary for daily life, such as personal care, communication, household management, and financial literacy.
- ❖ Promoting active participation in the community through volunteering, social activities, and fostering positive relationships with peers and neighbours.
- ❖ Supporting students to understand and manage their physical and mental health needs, promoting healthy lifestyles and self-care practices.

Play-based Approach:

We offer an engaging play-based curriculum that integrates that integrates real-life experiences and concrete resources. It emphasises the development of fundamental skills and independence, tailored to individual interests and motivations. Students benefit from explicit instructions, enabling them to develop meta-cognition, executive functioning, and effective use of working memory, essential for their transition into adulthood.

Low –demand Approach:

As an extension of the low arousal approach, the low demand approach was introduced to reduce anxiety, stress, fear and frustration that students may encounter. The aim of the low demand approach is to encourage emotional self-regulations of the students by reducing the demands and expectations that are placed upon them. This includes the language that is being used and the strategies implemented, which are aligned with Positive Behaviour Support.

TEACCH (Teaching, Expanding, Appreciation, Collaborating and Cooperating, Holistic):

We use TEACCH principles to provide structure across all areas of the school. This approach also emphasises the importance of identifying underlying strengths and needs related to autism and the use of visual supports to promote meaning and independence where appropriate. The TEACCH principles and techniques are utilised and implemented for individual students, but they may look very different at each stage of the person's life.

Attention Autism:

Attention Autism aims to develop natural and spontaneous communication through the use of visually based and highly motivating activities. The primary objective is that the sessions are fun and offer an irresistible invitation to learn. They are focusing on improving attention, developing shared enjoyment and encouraging interactions in a group setting. The Attention Autism programme progresses through

a series of stages, building on each skill level. Each new stage is introduced when the group is ready to expand attention skills.

The Zones of Regulations:

The zones of regulation empowers learners to understand the full range of their feelings, as well as explore tools and strategies to support their well-being. It provides them with an easy way how to think and talk about how they feel. Students in all pathways are being taught regulation competencies aligned to their developmental continuum and are given the opportunities to practice their emotional self-regulation skills in a safe and supportive environment. Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) is used to identify and further meet a person's needs, in particular if someone is distressed and at risk of harming themselves or others. Positive behaviour support strategies help to recognise the functions of behaviour and indicate effective strategies to support each student.

The Interoceptive Curriculum:

The Interoceptive Curriculum provides a systematic framework for building independent self-regulation, by sequentially teaching a learner to notice body signals, connect body signals to emotions, and then determine what action to take to promote comfort within the body. It also enhances the effectiveness of other self-regulation strategies and programs that are already in place.

Intensive Interaction:

Intensive Interaction works on early interaction abilities teaching the students to relate, interact and understand communication routines through taking part in enjoyable interaction and communication sessions. It develops the fundamentals of communication, such as use and understanding of eye contacts, facial expressions, vocalisations leading to speech, taking turns in exchanges of conversations and the structure of conversation.

The communication and social skills are being developed throughout all areas of curriculum to encourage the students to practise and develop their skills. Total communication approach is being used which is allowing finding and using the right combination of communication methods for each person. Speech and Language Therapy team and CENMAC work closely with staff and students to ensure that the communication needs of all learners are being addressed. Individual and group communication sessions are being scheduled on a weekly timetable to further target the progress of identified students.

Occupational Therapists lead on a whole school approach to ensure the students' sensory needs are met and integrated throughout the school day. Individual student profiles have been created in collaboration with parents and school staff to ensure a deeper understanding of each individual sensory needs. Occupational Therapy interventions are integrated across the curriculum to ensure a consistent approach and the ongoing development of skills to maximise potential for learning and independence. It is delivered to students intensively in 1:1 sessions, small groups and directly in the classroom enabling students to develop their motor, sensory and independence skills using a range of specialist and individual approaches. There are several fully equipped Sensory rooms throughout the school in which to carry out specialist interventions; these include gross and fine motor rooms and rooms dedicated to developing activities for daily living and independence.

Both our Health Education, Health Related Exercise and Relationships and Sexuality Education curriculum have been devised to support and develop physical, sensory, and emotional needs of our students.

PROVISION: THERAPY SUPPORT

Students at Charlton Park Academy have access to a team of skilled teachers and other professionals who work collaboratively to ensure that each young person has an individualised learning programme tailored to their specific needs.

Families are offered support and advice around their child's needs and prospects. Parents of identified students receive additional support from Autism Lead and Parent Officer. Regular parents' workshops are being delivered in person and online to evolve the parents' collaboration and share autism specific knowledge and skills.

Multidisciplinary support is available for all our students according to their needs. This consist of:

- Speech and Language Therapy
- CENMAC
- Physiotherapy
- Hydrotherapy
- Occupational Therapy
- School Nursing Team/Paediatrician
- Drama Therapy
- Art Enrichment
- Music Therapy

The therapeutic provision is offered in a 3- tiered level of support:

- ✓ The Universal Service: This is the foundation of understanding, knowledge and skills in communication, sensory processing and activities of daily living. The support is offered as a whole school approach.
- ✓ The Targeted Service involves class or group-based support.
- ✓ The Specialist Support is focused on direct and indirect input including assessments, consultancy, programmes and reviews.

TRANSITIONS

We recognise that transitions for autistic students and changes without preparation can be stressful and may lead to a difficult time. Transitions are unavoidable as the student moves through their education and beyond as well as through different environments. It is the duty of Charlton Park Academy to provide the appropriate structure and support whilst building the independence and resilience of our students ensuring that future transitions are managed as they enter adulthood. We recognise the importance of generalising the skills that our students learn across the school, at home and in residential settings. Staff regularly liaise with parents and carers, multidisciplinary teams, parent liaison and other external agencies to ensure continuity of approaches in and out of school.

Continuing professional Development (CPD) organised with a regular cycle

All our staff members undertake Autism specific training and have opportunities to develop and share good practice. This includes sessions on understanding autism, total communication, sensory processing, the zones of regulations, adapting the learning environment and visual structure.

We provide comprehensive professional development opportunities for all staff through both our experienced multi-disciplinary team at Charlton Park Academy and external specialists. Our professional development program stays current with best practices and adapts to meet our students' evolving needs. Training in communication development includes blanks levels, visual support training, non-directive play and intensive interaction, as well as practical strategies to supporting power based augmentative and alternative devices.

An ongoing collaboration with Prior's Court allows the staff to participate in further training and co-teaching sessions at Charlton Park Academy which allows them to develop the autism practice through sharing strategies and ideas and providing feedback and setting goals.

Charlton Park Academy Autism Handbook is in place to allow the staff an immediate access to the information and practical guidelines on how to implement the autism practice in the classroom. A set of short videos clips have been taken to demonstrate the strategies.

APPENDIX 1. FACTORS AND THEORIES ASSOCIATED WITH AUTISM

In 2013 the new diagnostic criteria known as the DSM-5 for autism was introduced. This replaced the traditional reference to the triad of impairments. The two main characteristics for diagnosis:

A. Persistent deficit in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts.

Autistic individuals cannot always accurately interpret the actions and intentions of others, making social interaction very difficult.

B. Restrictive, repetitive patterns of behaviour, including hyper or hypo reactivity to sensory input or unusual interests in sensory aspects of the environment (e.g. apparent indifference to pain/temperature, adverse response to specific sounds or textures, excessive smelling or touching objects, visual fascination with lights or movement).

- Autistic students may have developed imaginations but may have difficulty with flexibility of thought. They may experience difficulties with adapting to changes of routine and transitions.
- Many autistic people have difficulties processing sensory information. Consequently, they may struggle to generate appropriate responses to sensory stimuli, so they may under or over-react to them. This is often described as a difficulty with regulating the sensory system and adopting an appropriate level of calm/alert state which is crucial for learning and participating in school and activities of daily living, academic progress, emotional self-regulation and social interactions. Sensory overload can be accumulative throughout the day, week or month which make it difficult to detect triggers. These sensory differences can affect behaviour; can cause stress, anxiety and possibly physical pain, and have a profound effect on a person's life.
- Autistic students are known to experience high level of anxiety which impacts on their ability to learn and function appropriately in some contexts. They may react to how they experience the world and this can be seen as behaviour that challenge us. These responses and feelings are very real for autistic individuals. Whilst sensory issues are recognised as part of autism, each individual will have sensory needs that are specific to them.
- Autistic young people may exhibit stereotyped or self-stimulatory behaviour such as flapping, twiddling, rocking, spinning or obsessive and compulsive behaviour. This type of behaviour is heterogenous. It may indicate a feeling of overwhelmed, boredom or excitement. It can also be a pleasurable experience, and in many cases, it helps them organise and make sense of the world. Although it may help with emotional regulation, at times they can be absorbed by the experience which may negatively impact on their readiness for learning and participation in non-preferred activities.
- Due to sensory integration difficulties and restricted repetitive behaviours, some autistic learners have limited ranges of food they enjoy and may insist on a particular arrange of food or cutlery or may eat inedible items. Some autistic individuals are also diagnosed with ARFID (Aversive/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder) or Pica (appetite for non-food). Both diagnoses are recognised in the DSM-5.

Central coherence: this refers to the ability to bring lots of small details together to form the 'whole picture'. Autistic individuals can often notice and recall small details that others may miss but may have difficulty putting these small details together to view the "bigger picture". It could also be described as

the ability to 'read between the lines' of a situation. School staff should be mindful that there are many situations where students may need support to understand the wider aspects of a situation.

Executive functioning: Executive functioning is the ability to initiate, organise, plan, sequence and complete actions, routines, thoughts and behaviour in a logical and rational way. Autistic individuals often can fully focus on a matter of special interest to them, whilst having difficulty in processing a series of thoughts and actions. Autistic individuals may experience significant difficulties with executive functioning and therefore find it difficult to decide which actions to carry out, and in what order, to complete tasks. At Charlton Park Academy, we aim to support our students' executive functioning through considering carefully how we give instructions and using visual structure and schedules. We also help students to evaluate actions and experiences, so they can draw information from their past experiences to make decisions and choices about new experiences. This can be through a wide range of strategies such as choice4 boards, social stories, comic strips and social skills groups.

Theory of mind (or social thinking): People with autism are often said to have limited 'theory of mind'. This is the ability to recognise other people's thoughts, feelings and agendas and understand that these differ from their own. They may be less able to empathise with others and can struggle to understand other people's emotions. It may also be difficult for people with autism to recognise and judge other people's intentions.

FOR ADDITIONAL MATERIALS REFER TO:

What Is Autism?

<https://autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/what-is-autism>

[What is autism? - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/what-is-autism/)

How To Talk About Autism

<https://www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/help-and-support/how-to-talk-about-autism>

TEACCH

[Our Mission and Vision | TEACCH® Autism Program](#)

National strategy for autistic children, young people and adults

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-strategy-for-autistic-children-young-people-and-adults-2021-to-2026>

Intensive Interaction

[Intensive Interaction - Fundamentals of Communication](#)

EQUALS

[Curriculum EQUALS](#)