



Charlton Park Academy Autism Policy

Reviewed version by Heather Fraser (Autism Lead, Charlton Park Academy) May 2025
In response to a whole-school invitation, a working group was established, comprising of representatives from teaching staff across various Pathways and Key Stages, as well as therapists and support staff. The group convened on three separate occasions, with additional consultations held with the school therapy teams, CENMAC, and external consultants. The expertise and experience of all contributors played a valuable role in shaping the development of the policy. We extend our sincere thanks to everyone 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 Advanced TEACCH Consultant

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Autism Policy

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

- Safeguarding Policy- October 2024
- SEND Policy
- RSE Policy – Jan 2024
- Environment Policy - May 2025
- Behaviour for Learning and Relationships May 2025
- Communication Policy 2023
- Regulation Support Policy Oct 2025
- De-escalation Policy and Protocols.
- Curriculum Overviews

Core Values: Communicate, Persevere and Achieve

At Charlton Park Academy, we are dedicated to creating an inclusive, personalised and nurturing environment where every student can flourish. We hold unwavering high expectations for all our young people, recognising and celebrating their unique abilities whilst unlocking their full potential.

Our core values are woven into every aspect of school life – from our teaching approaches to our physical environment – guiding our students towards purposeful engagement in their education and meaningful participation in their communities.

The 'Golden Thread'

The 'Golden Thread' at Charlton Park Academy represents the vital connection between our students' aspirations, individual needs, outcomes, and the provision outlined in their Educational Health Care Plans (EHCPs) and Preparation for Adulthood (PfA) pathways. By embedding Preparation for Adulthood and EHCP outcomes throughout our curriculum design, we equip our young people with the knowledge, skills, and experiences essential for a successful transition to adulthood and active participation in society.

Our Mission

We empower our students to achieve ambitious outcomes by building upon their strengths and interests whilst addressing their individual needs through personalised learning pathways. Our curriculum goes beyond academic achievement – it prepares our young people to become as independent and confident as possible at each stage of their journey, enabling them to lead fulfilling lives beyond school. This is our pathway to meaningful engagement, where every student is supported to thrive and contribute to their community with confidence and capability.

Our Curriculum Vision

We deliver a dynamic, responsive curriculum that transforms lives. Every educational experience we create is purposeful, engaging, and designed to unlock potential – equipping our students with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to thrive both now and in their futures.

Excellence Through Personalisation

Our curriculum is ambitious and designed to give all learners, particularly those with SEND, the knowledge they need to achieve and thrive in later life. We don't just meet the diverse needs identified in each student's Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) – we exceed them. Academic achievement matters, but so does the whole person. We develop essential life skills, foster genuine independence, and prioritise the social and communication abilities that open doors to opportunity.

Preparing for Adulthood

Preparation for Adulthood sits at the heart of everything we do, ensuring our students develop the knowledge and skills needed for successful transitions. Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education Relationships and Sex Education Statutory Guidance whether our young people are moving into Key Stage 4, Post-16 education, vocational training, college, supported internships, volunteering, or employment, we empower them to make informed choices and pursue their individual aspirations with confidence.

Early Intervention, Lifelong Impact

We prioritise 'keeping up' rather than 'catching up', quickly dealing with any identified gaps in pupils' knowledge. From the earliest stages of learning, we cultivate autonomy, self-regulation, and independence. These aren't just educational goals – they're the foundations of a satisfying, fulfilling life. By nurturing these essential capabilities early, we maximise every student's potential to lead an independent life.

Truly Personalised Learning

We build on individual strengths, interests, and preferred ways of learning, using assessment information to implement a continuous cycle of planning, actions and review to reduce barriers to learning and wellbeing. Every student is unique. We don't just acknowledge this – we celebrate it. Our approach responds to each learner's strengths, interests, and learning preferences, ensuring every young person receives the individualised support they need to flourish.

Active Citizens in Our Community

Our curriculum promotes active participation and inclusion within the wider community, helping pupils understand that individual characteristics make people unique and supporting them to engage with adults in everyday situations. Our curriculum extends beyond the classroom. We create meaningful opportunities for students to engage with their community, developing the confidence, resilience, and practical skills needed for real-world independence. Through authentic community experiences, our students learn to navigate social situations, demonstrate appropriate behaviours, and apply their learning in real-life contexts – becoming valued, contributing members of society.

What is Autism? (read in conjunction with Regulation Support Policy 2025)

Autism is a lifelong developmental difference that shapes how individuals communicate and interact with the world. Far from being a deficit, autism represents a unique neurological profile – a different, not lesser, way of experiencing life.

Celebrating Neurodiversity

Every autistic person is unique. Like all people, autistic students have their own strengths and needs. Because of neurological differences in how their brains are wired, autistic individuals think, perceive, and process information in distinctive ways. They may see, hear, and feel the world with remarkable intensity or from entirely different perspectives than neurotypical people.

A Fundamental Part of Identity

For many autistic people, their autism isn't something separate from who they are – it's woven into the fabric of their identity. It influences their creativity, their problem-solving approaches, their passions, and their unique contributions to our school community.

What This Means in Practice

Autism can affect people differently, and areas of difference may vary significantly from one individual to another. Some autistic students may:

- Process sensory information (sounds, lights, textures, smells) more intensely
- Communicate in ways that differ from neurotypical expectations
- Excel in areas of deep interest or expertise
- Prefer predictability and clear structure
- Experience the world with heightened perception and attention to detail
- Need different approaches to social interaction and relationship-building

Our Commitment

At Charlton Park Academy, we don't view autism as something to be 'fixed' or 'overcome'. Instead, we celebrate neurodiversity and create an environment where autistic students can thrive as their authentic selves, whilst developing the skills and confidence they need for a fulfilling life.

Our Approach: Evidence-Based Excellence

At Charlton Park Academy, we don't just understand our students' unique needs and strengths – we celebrate them. We ensure the right resources and support are strategically deployed to enrich learning experiences and unlock potential.

Proven Strategies, Transformative Outcomes

Whilst autism is lifelong, evidence-based approaches can dramatically increase access to a full, broad and balanced curriculum for autistic students. We implement well-researched, proven strategies that create meaningful, supportive learning environments where all students can succeed.

These approaches benefit not only our autistic students, but also those who experience similar differences in social communication, sensory processing, executive function, and emotional regulation – regardless of diagnosis.

Building Resilience for Life

Our fundamental aim is clear: to equip every young person with the skills, knowledge, and resilience they need to thrive – not just in school, but throughout their lives.

Partnership in Action

We forge constructive relationships with families, working in genuine partnership to ensure a collaborative, consistent approach that supports each young person's development both in school and beyond. Parents and carers are not just informed – they are integral partners in their child's journey.

Our Commitment

At the heart of everything we do is an unwavering commitment: to empower our students to live full, meaningful, and inclusive lives within society. We don't prepare students for a separate world – we prepare them to be valued, contributing members of their communities, equipped with the confidence and capability to shape their own futures.

TEACHING AND LEARNING APPROACHES

Our approach to teaching and learning is built on four interconnected pillars that work together to create an environment where every student can thrive.

1. The Enabling Environment: Designed for Success

Our learning environment is purposefully designed to support the sensory, physical, social, emotional, and communication needs of autistic students and those with SEND. Every space is carefully crafted to optimise learning, promote active participation, and reduce anxiety and emotional dysregulation.

We create predictable, structured, and supportive settings where students feel safe, understood, and ready to engage. Environmental adaptations aren't an afterthought – they're integral to our whole-school approach and precisely tailored to meet individual needs.

This section should be read alongside our Environment Policy (May 2025), which provides comprehensive detail on how our physical and sensory environments support all learners.

Low Arousal: Calm, Not Empty

Our physical environment prioritises low arousal – reducing unnecessary stimulation whilst maintaining engagement. This isn't about creating sterile, empty spaces. Instead, we design distraction-free classrooms where every element serves a purpose.

Displays are meaningful and intentional, used only when they genuinely benefit student learning. Each visual element is carefully considered to support, not overwhelm.

Zoning: Clear Spaces, Clear Minds

We organise classrooms into clearly defined zones for:

- Individual and collaborative learning
- Relaxation and regulation
- Movement and sensory breaks

This clear spatial organisation helps pupils understand expectations and navigate their environment with confidence and independence.

Structure and Visual Support: Making the World Predictable

Structure transforms the world into a more predictable, accessible, and safer place for our students. It builds personal autonomy and independence, playing to the strengths many autistic individuals have in visual organisation and preference for order.

Our approach includes:

- **Small, specialised class sizes** that allow for individualised attention
- **Universal access to visual schedules** that make the day predictable and manageable
- **Clear routines and expectations** that reduce anxiety and build confidence

The Social Environment: Building Connections

We deliberately create opportunities for students to communicate and interact with peers, adults, and the wider community. Our social environment is designed to develop:

- Communication skills across different contexts
- Self-reliance and problem-solving abilities
- Functional skills for real-world application
- Confidence in social situations

Consistency: The Foundation of Security

Due to the complex learning barriers our students may experience, environmental consistency is recognised as extremely important. Consistency enables students to:

- Navigate and predict their surroundings with confidence
- Develop independence through familiarity
- Feel safe and secure throughout their school day
- Focus cognitive energy on learning, not decoding their environment

Every member of staff takes responsibility for adapting and maintaining the environment to meet student needs.

2. The Individual Student and Their Strengths: Unlocking Potential

Every student at Charlton Park Academy has a unique story, distinct strengths, and individual aspirations clearly outlined in their Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). We don't just acknowledge these differences – we build our entire approach around them.

The Golden Thread: Connecting Aspiration to Achievement

Central to our philosophy is the "Golden Thread" – the vital connection that weaves together:

- **Students' aspirations** – their dreams and goals for the future
- **Identified needs** – the specific support required to thrive
- **Intended outcomes** – the measurable progress we're working towards
- **Provision** – the educational, health, and care services designed to make it all possible

Preparation for Adulthood

By embedding Preparation for Adulthood (PfA) outcomes within our curriculum, we equip our students with far more than knowledge and skills – we provide real-life experiences that prepare them for successful transitions into adulthood. This enables them to actively participate in their communities, build meaningful relationships, and achieve genuine independence.

Key areas of Preparation for Adulthood

1. Community and Friendships: Building Connections That Matter

We actively promote participation in community life through:

- **Volunteering opportunities** that develop purpose and contribution
- **Social activities** that build confidence and social competence
- **Fostering positive relationships** with peers, neighbours, and community members
- **Real-world experiences** that develop social understanding and belonging
- **Building positive relationships through** 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.

2. Independent Living: Practical Skills for Everyday Life

We equip students with the essential practical skills needed for independence:

- **Personal care and self-management** – building autonomy in daily routines
- **Communication skills** – expressing needs, making choices, advocating for themselves
- **Household management** – cooking, cleaning, budgeting, organising
- **Financial literacy** – understanding money, making purchases, managing resources

These aren't abstract concepts taught in isolation – they're embedded throughout our curriculum and practised in authentic contexts.

3. Maintaining Good Health: Physical and Mental Wellbeing

We support students to understand and manage their physical and mental health needs, promoting healthy lifestyles and self-care practices. Relationships and Sex Education Statutory Guidance This includes:

- **Understanding their own health needs** and how to communicate them
- **Developing healthy habits** around nutrition, exercise, sleep, and self-care
- **Managing emotions and mental health** through regulation strategies and seeking support
- **Accessing healthcare** and understanding how to advocate for their needs

We teach students that wellbeing isn't just about avoiding illness – it's about thriving.

4. Higher Education, Employment and Training: Preparing for Purposeful Futures

We address the executive function challenges that can impact learning and work readiness:

- **Planning and organisation** – breaking down tasks, managing time, meeting deadlines
- **Working memory strategies** – using tools and techniques to support retention
- **Structure and routine** – creating predictable frameworks that support success
- **Focused attention** – developing concentration and task completion skills
- **Problem-solving** – approaching challenges with confidence and resilience
- **Learning in context** – applying classroom knowledge to real-world situations

Curriculum and Learning (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.

Play- based Approach:

We offer an engaging, play-based curriculum that integrates real-life experiences and the use of concrete, hands-on resources. This approach emphasises the development of fundamental skills and independence, carefully tailored to each student's individual interests and motivations.

Our students benefit from clear, explicit instruction that supports the development of *metacognition*, *executive functioning*, and *working memory*—all of which are essential for learning and crucial for a successful transition into adulthood. By embedding these skills early on, we lay a strong foundation for lifelong learning and independence.

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-regulation 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 offer an '**Irresistible Invitation to Learn**' developing natural and spontaneous communication highly motivating activities that are visually appealing. Activities need to be motivating, a shared experience and worth communicating about, activities that involve fun, laughter and fascination are motivating and remembered. The focus of the sessions is to improve attention, engagement, communication and connection within group sessions. 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 Interoceptive Curriculum:

The Interoceptive Curriculum provides a structured framework for developing independent self-regulation skills. It sequentially teaches learners to recognise internal body signals, connect those signals to specific emotions, and then choose appropriate actions to restore comfort and emotional balance.

This approach not only builds greater body awareness and emotional insight but also enhances the effectiveness of other self-regulation strategies and programmes already in place across the school. By embedding interoception into our curriculum, we empower students to better understand themselves and take greater control over their emotional and physical wellbeing.

The Zones of Regulations:

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, 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.

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 session, 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: Intervention 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 lining. 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

At Charlton Park Academy, we recognise that transitions and unexpected changes can be particularly challenging for autistic students. Without appropriate preparation, these transitions may lead to increased anxiety and dysregulation. Yet, transitions—whether between activities, environments, or educational stages—are a necessary part of every learner's journey.

It is our responsibility to provide a structured, supportive framework that helps students navigate these transitions successfully, while also fostering independence and resilience. Our goal is to ensure that future transitions, including those into adulthood, are approached with confidence and readiness.

We also understand the importance of helping students generalise the skills they learn across different settings, including at school, home, and in residential environments. To ensure consistency and continuity, our staff work closely with parents and carers, multidisciplinary teams, our Parent Liaison Officer, and external agencies. This collaborative approach supports each student's ongoing development and helps maintain stable, effective support strategies across all aspects of their life.

Continuing professional Development (CPD) organised with a regular cycle

At Charlton Park Academy, all staff members undertake autism-specific training and are encouraged to continually develop and share good practice. This training includes key areas such as:

- Understanding autism
- Total communication approaches
- Sensory processing and sensory regulation
- Interoceptive
- Zones of Regulation
- Adapting the learning environment
- Using visual structure to support learning
- Play-based learning
- Behaviour for Learning

We are committed to providing comprehensive professional development opportunities through both our experienced multidisciplinary team and external specialists. Our training programme remains current with evidence-based practices and evolves in line with the needs of our students.

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](#)

Attention Autism

[Home - Attention Autism Ltd | UK & Ireland](#)